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EATING OUT IN MODERN AMERICAN SOCIETY:
WHY DO PEOPLE MAKE THE CHOICE TO EAT OUTSIDE THE HOME?

A Thesis Presented

by

Anthony Epter

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

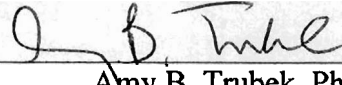
The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science
Specializing in Nutrition and Food Sciences

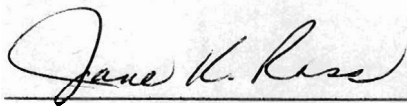
October, 2009

Accepted by the Faculty of the Graduate College, The University of Vermont, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, specializing in Nutrition and Food Sciences.

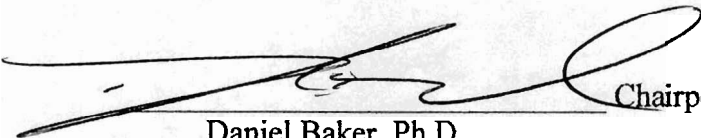
Thesis Examination Committee:



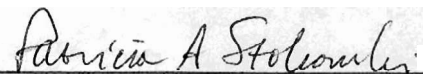
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Abstract

This study examines the relationship that people have with the modern day food environment. This study used a qualitative approach using interviews, videotapes, and questionnaires with seventeen participants. This varied approach was used to understand the decision-making process at dinnertime when deciding whether to cook at home or eat out at a restaurant. This was examined primarily through semi-structured interviews as well as the observation and videotaping of individuals preparing meals at dinnertime. The research resulted in three different categories of importance: why people choose to eat out, how people utilize restaurants, and the current roles restaurants have in modern American society. The results show the importance of restaurants in modern society beyond the nourishment that a meal can provide. Many of the themes that arose in this research have been seen in other research in this field, but a few new areas came up. For example, using a restaurant as a resource for new recipes to prepare at home was an area that emerged that had not been mentioned in the previous research. This shows that the relationship that American's have with the food environment outside the home is continuously transforming. Understanding all of the reasons people eat outside the home is important, as there is a general decrease in cooking practices inside the home. Gaining knowledge in how people make food choices on a daily basis is a good first step in being able to address public health issues that relate to food. This study explores the current food environment in order to have a deeper understanding of why people make the choice to eat outside the home, the ways people utilize restaurants, and the roles of restaurants in society.

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Introduction

Americans are faced with a number of food related decisions everyday. At dinnertime, there are a number of options an individual or family chooses from. They can prepare a homemade meal from entirely raw ingredients. They can make a meal at home using a mix of raw ingredients and convenience foods or they can prepare a meal using only convenience foods. They can also choose to skip the entire preparation aspect of the meal itself. They can get take-out from their favorite local restaurant or grocery store and eat it at home or they can choose to have the entire meal outside of the home and eat at a restaurant. Choosing from these different options is something that Americans will do not only at dinnertime, but also at breakfast and lunch. The food environment has so many options that it is common for people to eat at least one meal out everyday. More and more, people are making the choice to eat outside the home rather than being involved in the food preparation process, especially at dinnertime. This has become a great concern as a variety of factors including eating outside the home believed to be contributing factors to the current obesity epidemic.

This study is focused on better understanding the relationship that a group of individuals have with eating outside the home at dinnertime through spending time with them in their home kitchen. Working with the participants in the home kitchen allowed the researchers to be able to gather information about a family's food choices inside and outside the home. The relationship that Americans have with eating outside the home still has not been looked at exclusively from a qualitative perspective and represents an important part of understanding the modern food environment. Being able to understand

this relationship is key in being able to help individuals who want to improve their eating habits. Since the food environment has often been blamed for leading to weight problems in many Americans, it is important to understand individual factors relating to eating out before trying to develop programs to help people improve their food choices.

In this study, the food environment was explored from a number of different directions in order to understand how people make the choice to eat out. First, the food environment was looked upon in terms of the reasons that people choose to eat out and how people utilize restaurants. Then the food environment was looked at from the point of view of the functions that restaurants have in society today as places for social connections and resources for new ideas. Finally, the historical growth of restaurants and the food industry was considered in order to try to better understand how the food environment has been able to grow to the extent that it has. The idea that eating out is about much more than the nourishment the food provides was apparent throughout the entire research process and provided the overarching theme for the discussion of the research.

The first area that was explored was the different reasons why people make the choice to eat outside the home. This was the prospective area of interest when beginning the research project. Some examples of why people ate outside the home included trying new and different foods, to establish and maintain social connections and to enjoy a food that they would otherwise consider unhealthy. Other reasons include the positive experience of eating out as well as the escape from routine that going out to eat provides. For some individuals their threshold of capability in home cooking skills often led to

eating out because they did not feel confident in their ability to prepare certain foods with the same taste and flavor as a restaurant.

Through exploring the reasons why people make the choice to eat outside the home a number of other areas arose in the relationship that individuals have with eating out at restaurants. Above and beyond the reasons why individuals make the choice to eat outside the home was the different ways that individuals utilize restaurants as a resource to reallocate their time and energy. For example, participants often utilized restaurants when getting home from work late or feeling exhausted and not wanting to cook. This phenomenon was often expanded when individuals were away from home at mealtimes and were close to restaurants. From the findings on the utilization of restaurants and reasons people went out to eat it became clear that restaurants occupy an important cultural place in modern American society and it would not be realistic to assume that restaurants and the culture that goes along with it will ever disappear.

The most thorough and expansive current research on this subject is based in European countries like the United Kingdom. Many of the findings from researchers like Alan Warde and Lydia Martens were found to be similar in the United States, but a few entirely new ideas arose throughout the course of the research. The best example that is not currently in the literature is the use of the restaurant as a resource for creating new foods at home, but there certainly were other unique aspects to the findings of this research.

The following journal articles and discussions will provide insight into the modern food environment and the decision-making process when it comes to making the

choice to eat outside the home at dinnertime. This research would be best utilized in the future in formulating community based interventions focusing on cooking skills as well as helping individuals to change their eating habits outside the home. This research could also be used to create behavioral modification initiatives to improve the food choices people make when they go out to eat. This thesis is in journal article format following the style of the Journal of Nutrition for all citations with the exception of the second journal, which follows the format of the Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition. The first journal article looks at this research from an anthropological direction and the other journal article is more focused on the possible nutrition education programs that could be formulated from this research.

Literature Review

The goal of this study is to understand how individuals in a specified area make the choice to eat outside the home rather than prepare a meal in a given night. Based on the topic and area of interest for this study, a number of topics will be reviewed as part of the literature review. First of all, since this study has implications for public health policy, the food environment as a contributing factor to the obesity epidemic will be discussed. Once this is complete, the literature review will move to more specific topics relating to the choice to eat outside the home. Topics covered in this section will include the growth of the restaurant and food industry; making food choices; and the reasons that people make the choice to eat outside the home. The final topic, making the choice to eat out, will be discussed from three different perspectives: the use of convenience foods, choosing not to cook, and what attracts people to eat out. Overall this literature review will provide an adequate review of the literature, show the importance of the current study, and raise questions for future researchers.

Obesity – The Facts

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), “Overweight and obesity are both labels for ranges of weight that are greater than what is generally considered healthy for a given height” (1). The American Cancer Society estimates that 186,500 of the 559,650 (approximately 1/3) cancer deaths expected to occur in 2007 will be related to overweight or obesity (2). Overall, there are 300,000 deaths per year that are as a result of obesity (3). This number has surpassed cigarette smoking (168,000 deaths in 2007) as

the number one killer in America (2). In addition to cancer, obesity also contributes to the recent increase in type-II diabetes in children, (3-5) cardiovascular disease, as well as many other diseases (5). According to the Food and Drug Administration, obesity is an epidemic that has been steadily growing since the late 1980s when fewer than 23% (in 1988) of Americans were obese compared to over 30% today (6).

The growth in the incidence of obesity for children is also an area of concern. Currently, childhood obesity is increasing twice as fast as adult obesity and from 1980-1995 children aged 6 – 19 tripled their incidence of overweight (4). This shows that the obesity epidemic is reaching all populations and will continue to be a public health issue for many years. Finally, despite all the time and money put into creating programs to help control weight there is little evidence that obesity rates are decreasing (7). Continued growth of the obesity epidemic will have ongoing negative implications for society. As a result, programs to aid people in controlling their health and weight continue to be in high demand. One of the main goals of doing this research was to be able to determine any connected public health implications related to eating out so that recommendations could be made for the future.

Obesity – Contributing Factors

The CDC has listed a number of reasons why obesity has risen to the level that it has today. Their list of contributing factors includes: (8)

Table 1 : Contributing factors to obesity

• Genetics	• Metabolism
• Environment	• Behavior
• Culture	• Socioeconomic status

The two contributing factors to obesity that the CDC claims play the biggest role in the obesity epidemic are behavior and environment, both of which are the main focus for prevention and treatment (8). According to Horgen (4) “genes account for only 25-40% of body weight...60% of body weight is influenced by the environment.” Stroebe (9) further supports this argument by saying that there is “widespread agreement among researchers that changes in the environment that facilitate overeating and inhibit physical activity have contributed to the steep increase in obesity.” This shows how important it is to understand how the environment influences food related choices. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines environment as “the circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded” (10). Some specific examples include the physical environments that people spend time in including the home, work, school, and community environments and the availability of food in these places (8). This can include a broad array of factors like proximity to different types of restaurants and grocery stores as well as the presence of food advertising, just to name a few. Clearly in the context of making choices about eating, this definition can include endless factors, but it is important to try to consider these factors in order to better understand the food environment and why it is such a large contributing factor to obesity.

In 2001, the surgeon general stressed the importance of trying to improve the overall environment in five areas in order to curb obesity levels. The five areas stressed by the surgeon general included families and community, schools, health care, media and communications, and worksites (11). This covers almost every possible environment where food choices can be made. A description is provided for each of the following areas (11).

- **Family** represents “the foundation of the solution to the problems of overweight and obesity.” Family can be the place where information is dispersed and collected at the community level.
- **Schools** are a “key setting for public health strategies to decrease the prevalence of overweight and obesity.” This is an important place to provide the basis for healthy eating and habits for children.
- **Health Care** “system provides a powerful setting for interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence of overweight and obesity and their consequences.” The health care system should be working with individual people as well as in public policy to reinforce messages of healthy eating habits.
- **Media and Communications** can “disseminate health messages and display healthy behaviors aimed at changing dietary habits and exercise patterns.” Media and Communication fields need to improve the messages that they are sending to people so that they are not always about financial gain, but also about social responsibility.
- **Worksites** “provide many opportunities to reinforce the adoption and maintenance of healthy lifestyle behaviors.” Worksites can not only disseminate information, but they can also implement policies and programs to help people.

These five areas represent the different environments where food choices are made and can ultimately be improved. In the context of this study, the areas that this research will ultimately fit in later on include the family as well as health care environments because of the importance in working to improve public policy, improving individual choices through interventions, and improving the food choices families make together. Although the surgeon general’s call to action does not specifically suggest government

involvement in making laws to control the industrial food system, the choices that people make on a daily basis would be the driving force for change in the overall food environment.

Growth of the Food Industry

The current food environment has been classified by the CDC as being “obesogenic” meaning that it is “characterized by environments that promote increased food intake, nonhealthful foods, and physical inactivity” (12). This is likely due to the food choices that people have been making over time, but it is also due to the rapid and expansive growth of the food industry.

The food industry has shown expansive growth over time to become what it is today. Only 70 years ago, in 1939, only 19.2% of all food expenditures were made on foods away from home (13) and of these sales away from home only 7.1% were from limited-service or fast-food style restaurants (14). Furthermore, food sales away from home amounted to only 3.6 billion dollars compared with 15.1 billion dollars spent on foods consumed at home (13). The late 1930s was the first time that more attention was given to keeping track of food expenditures away from home, as government records show incomplete statistical data before the 1930s. The 1930s marks the beginning of the expansive growth of the food industry, especially leading up to and following World War II (15).

A good definition of the food industry is that it “encompasses the entire collection of enterprises involved in the production and consumption of food and beverages” (16).

According to Nestle, (16) as of 2003 the food industry accounted for almost 13% of the U.S. gross national product and employed 17% of the country's labor force. The involvement of so many Americans in the food industry shows how engrained the food industry has been historically and is currently in American society, politics, and financial sustainability of the country. The question that is left especially when thinking about what American's eat on a daily basis is: how did the food industry get to this point when in 1900 40% of people lived on a farm (16) and produced the majority of their food whereas today a single corporation can be vertically integrated to own all aspects of a food system? This is especially important to understand as the food industry is often blamed for creating an obesogenic environment.

Stroebe (9) has summarized a number of the reasons that Americans increased their eating outside the home over time, thus increasing the demand for a food industry designed to reduce the amount of time a person has to spend working with food. The first reason is because women have consistently been entering the workforce over time increasing the demand for commercially prepared meals because they no longer have the time to prepare meals seven days a week (9). French, et al. (17) estimated that in 1900 only 21% of women were in the workforce and by 1998 60% of women were part of the workforce. While more women have been entering the workforce, the amount of time preparing meals in a given week has been decreasing. It is estimated that in 1900, a family would typically spend 44 hours per week doing food related work whereas by 1998 only 10 hours per week were spent on food preparation (17). This shows there has been a general shift in cooking practices, which has resulted in reorganizing domestic

work from being time-intensive to more time-efficient as a result of the options provided by the food industry. The time period where a lot of this change occurred was in the 1940s and 1950s as the appearance of processed foods allowed for a re-allocation of time for women to do other things. Inness (18) phrases this re-allocation very well: “Time saved on household tasks through technology meant more opportunities for women’s personal development.” This development was something that was often slowed by social values at the time, but eventually did allow for more personal development for women. In addition, many researchers feel that the decrease in domestic labor and the increase in eating out has to do with feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s (19). Researchers are often split in their opinion of the transition of domestic cooking. Some feel that an old art form has been lost whereas others feel that women have been freed from a great deal of domestic hardships (19). It is difficult to conclude whether the food industry growth resulted in the shift of domestic work or if the shift in domestic growth resulted in the growth of the food industry, but they are certainly well connected.

Another factor in the growth of the food industry is the introduction of technological innovations like vacuum packaging, improved preservatives, deep-freezing, and microwaves over time (9). These innovations allow restaurants as well as companies to be able to move food to the consumer safely and quickly and without a great additional cost to the producer or the consumer. It was estimated that in 1965 a married woman who did not work would spend at least two hours per day making meals whereas by 1995 the same tasks would take less than half that amount of time due to technological innovations (20). At the same time the percentage of families that own a microwave increased from

8% in 1978 to 83% by 1999 (20). Another example of technological innovation comes from the shift in the consumption of the potato. Before the 1960s potatoes were primarily prepared at home either by boiling, mashing, or baking whereas French fries were rarely prepared at home or in restaurants because of the significant labor to peel, cut, and fry the potato (20). Once the technology was available to create French fries at central production facilities and process them to the point where they just needed to be reheated, the French fry rapidly became the most commonly eaten form of the potato and represented a 30% increase in potato consumption from 1977-1995 (20). Being able to centralize complex processes using technology allowed for foods that seemed to be complex to prepare all of a sudden readily available in a grocery store or restaurant.

A third reason is the massive amounts of advertising spending by the food industry that has risen with the growth of the industry (9). Advertising has historically been a major part of the food industry. In the 1920s, two major conglomerates, General Foods and Standard Brands, were formed. They were able to build monopolies for many products because they could afford to spend massive amounts of money on advertising that smaller companies could not afford to do (21). These two companies were able to rapidly expand and grow as they purchased small companies and used mass media advertising to build the market for those products (21). This is not different from many of the marketing plans used today by large companies. Today, it is estimated that the restaurant industry currently spends \$10 billion per year on advertising, and that 18% of all advertisements are related to food (3, 9, 22). The food industry is second only to the

automotive industry in total dollars spent on advertising and will continue to drive their sales by large scale advertising campaigns (23).

A great deal of food related advertising spending is through television advertisements. It is estimated that the U.S. fast-food industry spent \$3.5 billion dollars on television advertising in 2002 (22). The rest of the food, beverage, and confectionary industries spent a combined \$5.8 billion, most of which was to advertise unhealthy foods (22). In addition, only 1.9% of food advertising money was spent to promote fruits and vegetables in 1997 (23). Overall, increasing sales have allowed for advertising budgets to continue rising and allow for processed foods to be largely successful in the food industry.

The final reason for the growth of the food industry is because of the industrialization of the food industry that has led to low-cost foods that are very affordable to most consumers (9). The percentage of the cost of food that went to farmers decreased from 44% in 1972 to 23% by 1997 because of the cost to process all of the foods that are produced (20). In addition, the industrialization of creating food has resulted in reduced marginal and fixed costs in production as a result of the costs of production being shared by many consumers rather than just a few (20). This has led to a situation where labor in industrial settings has often replaced labor in the home and has allowed for the food industry to continue to grow and replace domestic labor.

These reasons represent only a small part of the reasons why the restaurant and food industry has grown, but the factors that made it possible for the restaurant and food industry to grow as much as it has allowed for the entire culture of eating in the United

States to shift to one that is more reliant on others for food preparation. Whether or not this negatively impacts the health of Americans is a subject of much debate, but Warde, et al. (24) discusses the information told to citizens relying on the food industry too much in England: “increased use of marketised food provisioning leads to the breakdown of family life, and therefore also to moral decline in society,” but this author then goes on to say that this is not true for all forms of industrially produced foods thus showing the continuous debate over the food industry. This just shows how complex of an issue it is to be able to show a direct cause and effect relationship between the food industry and the health of Americans.

Food Choices

There has been little research done to effectively understand how an individual goes through the decision making process to eat outside the home. This is likely because there are seemingly endless factors that can influence someone to choose to eat outside the home instead of cook. There are some models that exist in the literature that help to explain why someone may make a specific food choice (i.e. choosing a slice of pizza over a salad) but there has been little research to try to map out the decision making process when choosing to eat out. Steptoe, et al. (25) found nine different factors that influence food choice including healthfulness, taste or sensory appeal, price, convenience, tradition or familiarity, mood, and weight control. It is likely that many of these factors that influence making an individual food choice would also be a contributing factor in making the choice to eat outside the home. One of the main goals

of this research is to take a step towards making it possible to create a theory or model for making the choice to eat outside the home. For more information on making general food choices see Steptoe, et al., (25) Lennernas, et al., (26) and Lowry et al. (27).

Some of the potential factors that may influence the choice to eat out include psychological factors like food preferences, personal likes and dislikes, and response to sensory characteristics (28). Other reasons that have come up relating to food choice include current food trends, economic reasons, and biological factors, but little research directly relates to eating outside of the home (28, 29).

One particular example that would be useful in creating a model relating to the choice to eat out is the model created by Furst, et al. (30) in 1996 at Cornell University. This model follows the decision-making process relating to individual food choices, but was created with general categories so that it can be manipulated to fit the needs of other research. Please see Appendix A for the image of the conceptual model for food choice. Furst et al.'s (30) model was created in order to include decisions based on "conscious reflection, but also those that are automatic, habitual, and subconscious." Their work represented the culmination of many studies that were focused on food choices so that they could include a number of previous models and theories into building their own model. They used a qualitative approach where they interviewed 20 people that they recruited from grocery stores in central New York in order to build in-depth reasoning for the food choices that individuals make. From this research they were able to summarize three main factors relating to food choice: Life Course, Influences, and Personal System. (30) The following describes how these three categories work together:

Life course includes the personal roles and the social, cultural and physical environments to which a person has been and is exposed. A person's life course generates a set of influences: ideals, personal factors, resources, social framework and food context. These influences inform and shape people's personal systems, including conscious value negotiations and unconsciously operationalized strategies that may occur in a food-related choice situation. (30)

While creating this model, the researchers were able to name an expanded set of factors that are important in making food choices. Many of these factors likely can be applied to the choice to eat outside the home. These factors as well as the meanings for each factor have been compiled from the narrative in their discussion:

Table 2 : Identification of influential factors and meanings in making food choices

	Factor and Definition
Life Course	Social Environments – How family, friends, and social situations may influence an individual’s current food choices.
	Cultural Environments – How ethnic background and upbringing may influence an individual’s eating habits.
	Physical Environments – How the environment around people shapes their food choices. This includes both inside the home as well as outside the home.
Influences	Ideals – What a person strives to be able to do or feels is the “right way.”
	Personal Factors – Personal preference in food choices, i.e. likes/dislikes, allergies, etc.
	Resources – Includes money, time, equipment, and cooking knowledge as resources.
	Social Framework – Mainly considers the issues that arise in families surrounding food, but also includes workplace context and going to other people’s houses for meals.
	Food Context – This considers the food system, food supply, availability of certain foods and where they shop.
Personal System (Value Negotiations)	Sensory Perceptions – Taste and flavor as factors in food choice.
	Monetary Considerations – Considers the price and perceived value of the food.
	Convenience – Includes ease of access, preparation, as well as the time involved.
	Health & Nutrition – Includes eating in both a beneficial (as nutrients) way as well as in a negative as in weight-gain or disease causing way.
	Managing Relationships – Accommodating to the tastes and preferences of people around you.
	Quality – This includes quality as a degree of excellence, as a degree of acceptability, and as food prepared at home.

In this study, the researchers were able to reinforce previous theories and formulate some new ones. For example, the already existent theories included the idea that the life course always needed to be considered when making food choices (30). The two new areas of importance that emerged in this study included the importance of ideals as well as the identification of managing relationships when making food choices. (Meanings can be seen in Table 2) (30). Most importantly to future studies is that the researchers were able to create a model that could be used across different disciplines and apply to many different concepts. This model can be used and tested in other areas related to food choice including the choice to eat outside the home, which will be accomplished in the second journal article. The only main limitation to using their research in other situations is that their model was created with the concept of making one individual food choice rather than considering the interactions of the different factors or any feedback that may result from one particular factor (30). Ideally, this model will be applicable to making food choices outside the home and can be helpful in better understanding the overall decision-making process relating to eating out. The current research available relating to making the choice to eat outside the home will be discussed next.

Making the Choice to Eat Outside the Home

In this section a number of research areas will be reviewed in order to see the strengths and weaknesses of the research that is currently available. The subject of making the choice to eat out will be looked upon from both the direction of making the choice to eat out as well as making the choice not to cook. The main area of importance

is to understand the current continuous shift in sourcing of meals from the home kitchen to restaurants, take-out places, supermarkets, and convenience stores. This will be discussed first in the context of using prepared foods when cooking, then in the context of choosing not to cook, and finally in the context of the reasons people make the choice to eat out.

Convenience Foods

The first topic to be discussed is why people supplement the meals that they prepare at home with convenience foods. A growing area of interest relating to convenience foods is understanding why and how consumers use convenience foods in their meal preparation. Traub et al. (31) defined a convenience food as “any fully or partially prepared food in which significant preparation time, culinary skills, or energy inputs have been transferred from the homemaker’s kitchen to the food processor and distributor.” Convenience foods include a broad array of foods that people use to supplement or replace their cooking process. Convenience foods are ubiquitously available and continue to become more popular in the home kitchen. It is estimated that only 34% of dinner meals were made without any commercially produced food as of 2004 (32). Another study found that in 2007 57% of all dinner meals were made entirely from whole ingredients (33). Clearly both of these statistics have their own specific set of limitations, which explains their drastic differences, but the point is that individuals have the tendency to rely on prepared foods even when they are cooking at home. Oftentimes, people do not want to cook from whole ingredients, but there are many more reasons for using convenience foods on a regular basis.

According to Sloan et al. (33), the top two reasons people rely on convenience foods when preparing dinner is because it “required little effort or was easy to make” and “took little time/no planning.” This shows how important it is to the average American to be able to make the preparation of dinner simple and fast. Increasingly, Americans value the time saved by using a convenience food more than the additional cost to purchase it (34). The shifting value to use more convenience foods has been supported by the decrease in the real cost of food to the average American household by 33% since 1960, allowing for more disposable income to be spent on food (34). This is based on the adjusted amount of money spent on food per family compared to their income.

Another study found that people used convenience foods for other reasons besides as a way to save time. Costa, et al. (35) did qualitative laddering interviews (using an interview guide to steer the interview based on responses and find out why certain things were important to participants) with 50 Dutch participants and found that for people that did use prepared meals there were a number of other reasons for using prepared meals including:

Table 3 : Reasons Dutch individuals used prepared meals

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact on work performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact on athletic performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow participants to avoid stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow participants to lead a more leisurely lifestyle

Based on these additional reasons, convenience foods not only save time, but they allow for individuals that may find cooking to be a stressful or tiring activity to avoid the cooking process altogether. As far as work performance is concerned this is likely due to the time saving effect of eating a convenience food during the work day. Of the participants in this study that did not use prepared foods, they often felt that spending less time and energy cooking “could become a source of reproach and regret” meaning that they likely would feel guilty if they used these foods instead of preparing a meal from scratch (35). Despite the differing opinions of participants, both groups of people felt that an entirely homemade meal was more tasty and satisfying than commercially prepared meals (35). The reasons listed above represent the main reasons why people use convenience foods to supplement their meals.

Overall, many researchers feel that consuming convenience foods does not contribute to a healthy overall diet. Hyland, et al. (36) hypothesized that “Reliance upon low cost convenience foods, many of which are high in fat, free sugars and salt, coupled with limited consumption of fruit and vegetables, may lead to a diet far removed from current recommendations.” Despite the generalization that convenience foods are typically seen as being unhealthy there is a growing demand for healthier convenience foods. According to Sloan, et al. (33), 48% of people surveyed said that the most important part of defining a convenience food is that it helps an individual maintain a healthy diet. This category was specified as more important than the following other ways to define a convenience food: little or no preparation (34%), portable (20%), packaged as a complete meal (17%) and single serving (16%) (33). This shows that

despite the continued use of convenience foods, many people are considering the overall health of these foods as they are regularly integrated into their everyday diet. It is important that more healthy convenience foods are created and offered to consumers who are looking for these foods because convenience foods have become such a large part of a typical American's diet.

Choosing Not to Cook

It is understood that oftentimes people make the choice to use pre-prepared foods when cooking, but people also make the choice not to cook at all. Understanding why people make the choice to eat out from the perspective of why people do not want to cook is equally important to understanding why people make the choice to eat out. This is important because it can show if either eating out or not having to cook is more influential in the decision to eat food prepared outside the home. Costa et al. (35) found that people made the choice to cook at home because it involves the following consequences and values: "doing my duty, keep eating habits, enjoyment-pleasure, save money, socialising-belonging, and control" but understanding why people do not want to cook in a given night involves an entirely different set of factors.

Understanding if there is any relationship between socioeconomic status and time spent cooking a meal may reveal some reasoning why people choose not to cook. Considering socio-economic status seems to go hand in hand with the concept of time when considering cooking habits. Mancino et al. (37) did multivariate analysis of the American Time Use Survey in order to determine how much time is spent cooking in

high versus low-income households. Mancino et al. (37) found that low-income nonworking women spent the most time cooking per day (71 minutes) and that with increasing income and working time women spent less time cooking (38 minutes for high income full-time working women). This was a result that was expected in the study, but what they did not expect was that with increasing income for men, they had the tendency to cook more often overall (37). In general, the researcher felt this was the case because many women still do the majority of cooking in a given household and that any correlations with men cooking would be unrelated to overall meal preparation for the family (37). Research by Harnack, et al. (38) found that women are still the one most responsible for family meal preparation. They surveyed 5,589 males in the 1994 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes of Individuals and found that only 23% of males were involved in meal planning, 36% were involved in shopping, and 27% were involved with meal preparation (38). In this study they concluded that women still are the best to be targeted for cooking based interventions that are related to nutrition. This trend seems to be continuing, as 88% of participants were women in a pilot cooking intervention to improve overall cooking skill (39).

Relating back to the choice to cook or not cook, this information supports the idea that families with a lower income are less able to make a choice about whether or not to cook in a given night. Since cooking is the less expensive option for families, those with limited income have to cook more often than not despite whether they want to or not. The difference between low and high-income families is that higher income families more often than not have the option to not cook and rely on someone else to prepare their food,

especially if they want to have more leisure time. Consumers that make the choice not to cook in order to have more leisure time are called “time-buying consumers” because they are willing to spend additional money in order to not have to cook (40).

As of 1999, the average American spent 10.4% of their disposable income on food and the way this money is allocated in high versus low income families differs greatly when considering food at home versus food away from home (41). This is exhibited by an increase in income leading to an increase in eating outside the home. In general, a 10% increase in income leads to 4% more money spent on food away from home and only 1% more on food prepared at home (37). Overall, a lower level of income someone has may contribute to “food insufficiency by preventing people fully participating in food culture” (42). Socioeconomic status likely determines whether or not a family or person feels that they have the resources to make the choice not to cook, but it does not take into consideration the cognitive process when deciding whether or not to cook.

A study by Larson et al. (43) found a number of reasons that young adults made the choice not to cook. Larson et al. (43) completed a longitudinal study assessed with a food frequency questionnaire and what they found was that 23% of males and 18% of females cited inadequate cooking skills as a main reason for not cooking meals for themselves. In addition to a lack of cooking skill, they also found that 36% of young adults felt that the most common barrier to food preparation was a lack of time. Finally, conditions that were specific to the group of individuals studied included not having access to a kitchen or essential tools to cook with as another major reason why young

adults did not prepare their own foods (43). Although these reasons are not necessarily generalizable to other populations because this study was focused on young college aged adults, many of the reasons why the individuals in this study chose not to cook also arose in other studies.

Stead, et al. (44) conducted a general cooking course and then followed up with focus groups with 16 respondents in order to better understand if cooking skill is a barrier to meal preparation. What they found was that 50% of their respondents defined their cooking skill as “basic but fearful” whereas 25% defined their cooking skill as “useless and hopeless” or “confident” (44). The “basic but fearful” group expressed their anxiety in experimenting with foods different from their typical repertoire and they felt their cooking needed improvement (44). The “useless and hopeless” groups discussed that they often used convenience foods and in general felt disempowered by the entire cooking process, especially cooking from scratch (44). In this study 75% of the participants expressed some lack of confidence in the cooking process, which may lead them to not cook in a given night, especially if the food they want is something that is not within their realm of cooking skill. Some of this frustration has to do with a general shift in criteria concerning what defines the standards in a meal prepared at home. There is increasing acceptance among researchers of the idea that the commercial food industry is now indirectly determining the criteria for what people define as good food (44). This is as a result of the shift in perception that foods prepared by individuals should resemble what they eat from a package or at a restaurant (44). Based on the findings of the study the researcher concluded that many people never learn or are entirely unprepared to cook and

that teaching people how to cook represents only one facet in an extremely complex social and cultural system that make up healthy eating (44). This is something that will likely continue in the future as individuals rely on people outside of their own homes to prepare their meals and practice their own cooking skills less often.

Lang et al. (42) looks at the issue of cooking skill as a barrier to cooking in a slightly different manner. In their research they look at the shift in cooking skill in the UK in the same way as a culinary transition. A culinary transition is defined by the researcher as “the process in which whole cultures experience fundamental shifts in the pattern and kind of skills required to get food onto tables and down throats” (42). The researcher questions the importance of cooking especially in wealthy, high-tech societies because of the ability to rely on others for food preparation. The researcher is concerned that in the next few decades cooking could possibly disappear altogether because there is no longer a need to learn to cook, as a result of the skill transition that is occurring in the United Kingdom (42). This researcher expresses how people no longer feel the need to learn to cook, it has become optional especially in areas with many other food options available (42). It is unlikely that cooking in the home would ever disappear entirely, but the continued decline of cooking should be a great concern if cooking at home is in any way related to maintaining a healthier overall diet.

Overall, there are a number of factors that influence an individual not to cook when they are explicitly considering the act of cooking a meal from start to finish. The main barriers that influence an individual to not cook include the availability of disposable income, an individual feeling like they have no time to cook, having a level of

cooking skill they are confident with, and having accessibility to a kitchen and necessary tools. The next section will focus on what influences individuals to make the choice to eat outside the home.

Choosing to Eat Out

The final and main area of importance to this research is looking at what drives people to make the choice to eat out as often as they do. People make the choice to source their meals from restaurants and take-out places more than ever before. It is estimated that the average American eats 200 total meals out per year, many of which are from fast food restaurants (9). In addition, there has been a shift in the number of people that eat multiple meals out per week. It is estimated that 20% of people eat breakfast out at least 3 times per week, 21% eat lunch out at least three times per week, and 9% eat dinner out at least three times per week as of January 2008 (33). Overall, it is estimated that the average household spends \$1,650 per year eating outside the home (45). In this section, the reasons that individuals make the choice to eat out will be discussed.

In a study by Stewart, et al. (46) researchers tried to determine what people value most when eating out in terms of convenience, taste, and nutrition. The researchers were also trying to find out whether or not participants want healthy food when they eat out and if they apply their health knowledge to the food that they eat (46). This study revealed a great deal of information from their sample of 700 New Jersey residents. Out of this group, they found that three-quarters of the participants ate out at least once a week, and that participants ranked the importance of the three categories in the following

order: taste, nutrition, and convenience (46). In addition to these three categories, they also found that there were some other reasons that participants chose to eat out including entertainment value, limited budget, and limited time (46). This study will be discussed again later when focusing on the convenience of eating out.

In another study relating to what drives people to eat out, Kim et al. (47) did work relating to local food consumption on trips and holidays in England. What is most interesting about this study is the assumption from the onset of the study that one would have to be in a foreign environment in order for these different factors to be applicable. The different factors found are likely applicable to eating outside the home on a regular basis. Although this study provides rich information, it is not necessarily applicable to the American food environment and has not been explicitly considered in the food environments that are directly surrounding one's home. As a result, this information is just being used as a springboard into other researcher's work. A lack of American based restaurant literature was a limitation to the research available relating to what drives people to make the choice to eat outside the home.

Through qualitative interviews Kim, et al. (47) was able to find a number of different themes that arose as to why people made the choice to eat out on a trip or holiday, besides the absence of a home kitchen:

Table 4 : Why English people eat while on vacation

• Exciting experience	• Escape from routine
• Health concerns	• Learning knowledge
• Authentic experience	• Togetherness
• Prestige	• Sensory appeal
• Physical environment	• Physiological reasons

The four areas that relate to this research the most include eating out as an exciting experience, escape from routine, togetherness and convenience. These three topics, among many others, will be considered from the point of view of the study on eating out while on trips, but also from the point of view of other researchers.

Experience of Eating Out

Participants discussed eating foods that they had never tried before as an exciting experience that brought the activity of eating a meal to a greater level than simply trying to get nourishment from that meal (47). Research by Stewart, et al. (46) found that 468 out of 1,029 individuals cited the enjoyment of the meal as the most important factor in choosing what restaurant to go to. This outweighed the convenience and healthfulness of a particular restaurant (46). From a psychological point of view, Kim, et al. (47) says that having an exciting meal that combines expectation and satisfaction can even become a way to improve oneself emotionally (47). Rust, et al. (48) agrees with the idea that eating at a restaurant can create an exciting experience, but that it also heightens expectations

for the next meal out because of the memories associated with the previous experience. This can result in an increased enticement to eat out, because the individual wants to relive or recreate positive experiences that they had outside the home in a restaurant (48). In addition, Sparks, et al. (49) found that a primary motivation for eating out on a holiday was because of the discovery of new and exciting foods that someone would not normally prepare for themselves. Finally, Costa, et al. (50) further supports the idea that eating out is exciting because of the general “excitement/adventure by creating the opportunity to come in contact with different eating cultures.”

Escape from Routine

The next area of interest is the escape from routine that occurs when eating out at a restaurant. In Kim et al.’s (47) study they found that eating out at restaurants when on a trip or holiday is a way to escape from the typical routines of everyday life. Ashley, et al. (19) agreed with this idea by saying “eating out is an occasional treat, a special occasion, to be enjoyed as a departure from run-of-the-mill, everyday experience.” Being able to escape from routine has more meaning than the obvious. Warde, et al. (51) listed a number of reasons that emphasize the escape from routine that makes eating out special. These reasons include:

Table 5 : Reasons that eating out represents an escape from routine

• Eating different foods	• Eating at different times (i.e. holidays, weekends)
• Eating in different surroundings	• Eating with different company

These reasons are all related to the desire to escape from eating a meal at home. Home cooking seems to have a general negative association connected to it because it is often part of a typical routine. Many researchers discuss that eating different foods is a very important part of eating out because many people just have a typical set of foods that they prepare that they rarely step outside of (19, 51). Going out to eat allows people to enjoy different foods without having to leave their comfort area in meal preparation. In addition to enjoying different foods when eating out many people enjoy the idea of being in a different environment, wearing different clothes, and being with other people. The entire experience of eating outside the home is a major part of what attracts people to restaurants. Another aspect that attracts people to restaurants are the social aspects of eating out which will be discussed next.

Social/Togetherness

The togetherness or social aspect of eating outside the home is a very important factor in making the choice to eat outside the home. It is generally a rarity to see an individual eating out at a restaurant alone. Warde, et al. (51) found in a survey focused on eating out that 75% of people agree with the statement “I dislike eating alone.” Eating out represents a way to become better acquainted with a stranger, to build or maintain romantic relationships, and to celebrate important events with friends and family (51). In general, eating out can fulfill one’s social needs (51). For some people, eating out can represent a social obligation to a friend or family member even if they dislike eating outside the home (51). This is because eating out is commonly accepted as a mainstream

way to socialize with others and for many people the food consumed is not as important as the company (51). In this type of situation, the nourishment gained from the food eaten at a restaurant has little to do with the choice to eat out.

In addition to experiencing social connections, eating out represents a symbol of status and distinction in social class. According to Ashley, et al. (19) being comfortable with the structured nature (i.e. menus, order of food served, dress code, etc.) of different restaurants can exhibit the level of distinction that an individual person has. Being comfortable in many types of eating situations often signifies the social class an individual represents. This level of comfort is often referred to as “cultural omnivorousness” (19) and originates with research done by Bourdieu in his book *Distinction: The Social Judgement of Taste*. Overall, the experience of eating at a restaurant is thought to be connected to an individual’s aspiration for a particular social status.

There is an ongoing debate among researchers in this field regarding the use of restaurants as a venue for social interaction. Researchers like Warde et al. (51) feel that the setting of a restaurant is a positive environment for social interaction. This is because the restaurant creates an environment that can be used by many individuals for social interaction without any individual pressure over the actual location of a meeting. Warde et al. (51) as well as Costa, et al. (50) also felt that eating out at restaurants would not have a negative impact on family socializing and in a lot of cases it can improve the sociality of a family through the different meal experiences a family goes through over time. Other researchers, however, do not look at restaurant eating as positively as a place

for socialization. For example, Finkelstein (52) felt that using restaurants as a social medium is a poor choice. This is because it results in incivility as the entire structure of meals outside the home is structured to the point where “we are in effect role-playing, and the roles have been fixed in advance for us to slot into.” Essentially, Finkelstein is saying that the environment in restaurants is so far out of our control that conversations and social interactions will be negatively impacted. Ashley et al. (19) disagrees and thinks that the codified nature of restaurants may in fact result in meaningful social interactions. Either way, the structured construct of restaurant meals has resulted in a different form of social interaction that did not exist in such a significant quantity until the last fifty years.

The complexity of social interactions related to restaurants continues to be an area of great research and debate. As a result of the continued use of the physical environment of the restaurant as a social medium for interactions, researchers have been concerned with better understanding whether or not this environment fosters or impedes social interactions. Researchers are continuously questioning whether or not restaurants are suitable places for social interactions, whether they represent an individuals’ class appropriately, and whether or not the restaurant has replaced the home as the main place for important celebrations. The final area that will be discussed relating to the choice to eat out is the convenience that restaurants provide in America.

Convenience

The final reason that individuals often choose to go out to eat is because it is convenient and can be used as a time saving resource. Often, convenience can motivate an individual to make the choice to eat out. Stewart, et al. (46) did research with 700 individuals living in New Jersey in order to determine if they think about health and nutrition when eating outside the home. What they found was that when individuals were most concerned with the convenience of obtaining their meal, they were 17% more likely to go to a fast food restaurant for a meal (46). Overall, convenience was the third most important attribute to the choice to eat out and the second most important reason for choosing a particular restaurant (46). They also found that convenience along with time were major factors when making the choice to eat out and that these factors can often outweigh the desire for a healthful meal (46). Overall, they found that convenience was a critical factor in both making the choice to eat out as well as the particular restaurant chosen to eat at.

In another study, Sloan (33) found a trend that suggests that the convenience of eating out at certain types of restaurants is shifting purchasing to quick service restaurants. As of May 2007, “traffic at fine-dining restaurants and upscale hotels was down 4%, midscale fell 1%...casual dining was flat, and quick service restaurant traffic grew 1%” (33). These numbers show a number of different things. First of all, there is likely a general shift in type of restaurants that people are eating out because convenience is such an important aspect of eating out. This is directly connected to the amount of time that is used when eating at a fine dining restaurant versus a fast food restaurant. In

addition to the shift because of the demand for convenient and fast foods, the United States is also in the midst of a recession, which is likely forcing Americans to think more about the way they spend their disposable income. This is exhibited by the continued increase in the purchase of take-out foods. The following take-out items have been able to increase greatly between 2005 and 2007: (33)

Table 6 : Increase in Purchase of Take-out Foods Between 2005 and 2007*

Pizza	Increased from 41% to 53%
Chinese Food	Increased from 22% to 37%
Burgers and Other Sandwiches	Increased from 24% to 35%
Steak	Increased from 4% to 13%
Other Italian Foods	Increased from 6% to 12%

* Note – Data collected from a multiple answer survey, allowing for total percentages to eclipse 100%.

Ordering take-out has likely grown during this time due to economic problems, as well as the ability to save time in obtaining a meal. There has been an increase in foods that you would previously only order at a restaurant, (i.e. steak) suggesting that many consumers want a similar meal to what they would be eating at a restaurant rather than foods that are commonly ordered from a take-out restaurant. In addition, ordering take-out is also cost effective because it removes the need to provide a tip for the waiter or waitress when eating in a restaurant. The take-out meal allows individuals to be able to eat restaurant foods without taking the time to actually sit in the restaurant and wait for them to be prepared.

Overall, there are a number of different reasons that influence an individual to make the choice to eat outside the home. This section discussed the excitement of eating out, the escape from routine, the social implications, as well as the convenience of eating out. All of these factors were discussed from the point of view that these are all aspects of restaurant eating that attract people to go out to eat. The choice to go out to eat cannot just be looked at from the perspective of what attracts an individual to a restaurant. The choice not to cook or to utilize convenience foods are all both important aspects to consider because they each represent a different option when a meal-time arrives. The complexity of making the choice of what to eat was displayed through the discussion of the different options at meal-time and hopefully the importance of better understanding the interaction between the choice to cook or not cook has been made clear.

Limitations to the Current Research

After reviewing the literature available, the main issue that arises is that there is little qualitative research relating to the choice to eat outside the home in America. A number of the resources used in this literature review were based on research done in England or other European nations. The research that was used in this section that was from abroad was the most comprehensive and in-depth information that is available pertaining to restaurants in modern society. There has not been any publications in America that attempt to comprehensively discuss restaurant eating the way that Alan Warde and Lydia Martens have done in their book *Eating Out: Social Differentiation, Consumption and Pleasure*. This book was written based on multiple surveys and in-

depth interviews focusing on restaurant culture in the 1990s in the United Kingdom. In addition, research done by Ashley et al. (19) titled “Food and Cultural Studies” which is basically a mix of literature review and discussion about the issues that different researchers bring up is also heavily reliant on research done overseas in order to make claims about restaurant eating. It is likely that many of the reasons for eating outside the home in other countries are on par with Americans reasons for eating out, but there are certainly going to be some cultural differences.

Most of the research available in the United States focuses on the quantitative nature of how often people eat out as well as ranking the importance of certain variables when eating out rather than better understanding all the factors that influence why people make the choice to eat out. This represents a gap in the current literature. The current literature allows for suggestions to be made about the decision-making process when eating out, but it has not been explicitly considered. This research is hoping to determine some of the preliminary reasons why Americans make the choice to eat out as well as begin the process of understanding the complex system of personal and environmental factors that shape a food choice. What is certain, however, is that the eating outside the home represents far more than the nourishment that the meal provides.

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Journal # 1 - Why Americans Make the Choice to Eat Outside the Home

Why do people make the choice to eat outside the home at dinnertime rather than prepare a home cooked meal? This study looks at the decision-making process at dinnertime in order to answer this question. Americans continue to eat out more and cook less often, which is why this area of research is important to consider. In this study, looking at the relationship that individuals have with restaurants has shown that eating outside the home is about much more than the nourishment a particular meal provides. Researchers in this field agree with the idea that restaurants are more about experience and pleasure rather than nourishment when eating out. This main point of this article is to provide a set of different reasons that people eat outside the home in order to build upon the amount of information available regarding making food choices in the United States. This will allow for future researchers to be able to fully understand the decision-making process at dinnertime in order to be able to build programs for people that want to improve their food choices.

In addition to understanding the motivations for eating out it is important to see if there are any implications with this type of research to current public health issues. Researchers have expressed the importance of understanding the relationship that Americans have with the food environment outside the home in order to fully understand current public health issues (1, 2). The majority of background information in this article comes from research done in Europe and more specifically the United Kingdom. This is the case only because there is a lack of qualitative research on restaurants in the United States. Most research in this area in the United States focuses on usage and nutritional

aspects of food eaten outside the home rather than understanding why people eat out in the first place. The decision-making process at dinnertime is not fully understood and requires continued research in order to be able to build a complete understanding of restaurant culture in the United States.

This study is part of a larger project that is focused on understanding the factors that shape cooking practices and knowledge in America. At the origin of this study, the investigation was trying to understand eating outside the home from a public health perspective, however the roles that restaurants carry in our current society also became quite clear. The roles of restaurants as well as the reasons individuals eat outside the home will be the primary areas of focus in the following pages.

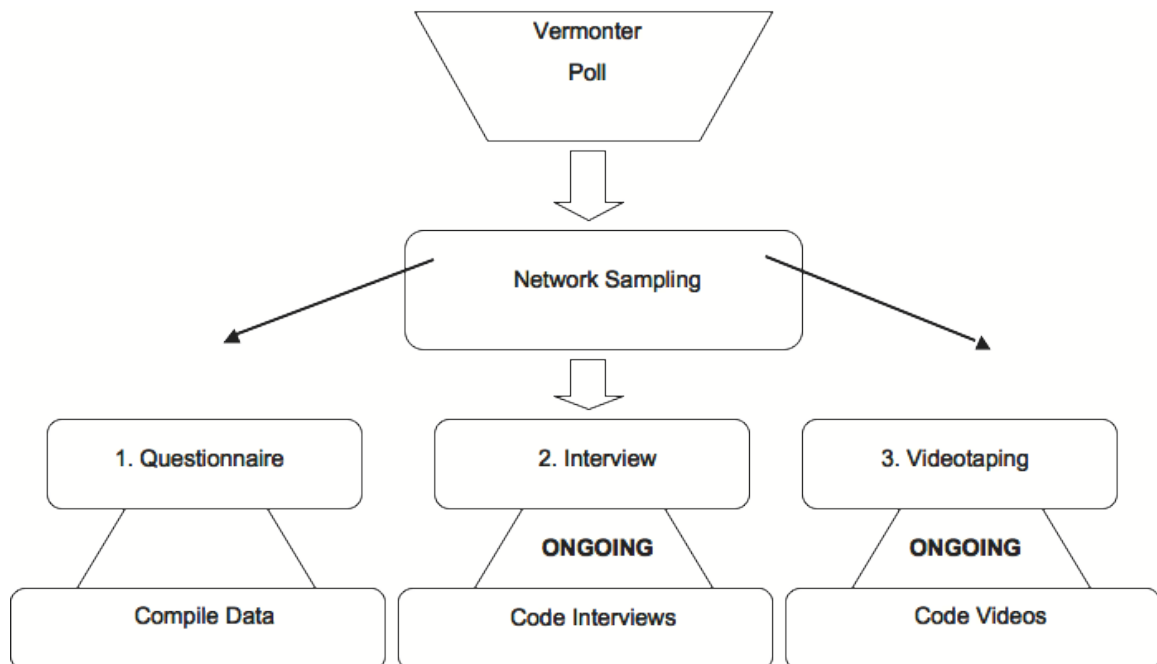
The data in this study was gathered through a number of different approaches, as is illustrated in Figure 1 (below). Preliminary quantitative data was collected through the locally based Vermonter Poll. The Vermonter Poll is a telephone-based polling service offered through the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont. This information provided background information about the eating habits of Vermonters. Specifically, the Vermonter Poll revealed information about frequency of eating out, health of meals eaten out, and whether or not time is a factor when eating out. This information was used in order to formulate questions to be asked during semi-structured interviews.

Seventeen participants were gathered through a combination of network sampling and snowball sampling. Network sampling was accomplished through finding local contacts in each of three locations that the research took place in (Boston, MA,

Burlington, VT, and Middlebury, VT). Each contact person acted as a middleman between the researcher and the potential participant in order to avoid any situations of discomfort or pressure for the potential participant. Once a few participants were enrolled in the study the strategy switched to a snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is when one participant that is enrolled in the study can recommend other potential participants that they think would be beneficial to the study (3). This allows the researcher the freedom to be able to work with new people that may be able to provide rich information to the study and to be able to answer any new questions that arise during the research process.

Once participants were enrolled in the study, they completed three different stages of the research process. These are illustrated below in Figure 1.

Figure 1 : Outline of General Research Process



Each participant went through the research process in the same order as is seen above. The questionnaire collected demographic information and asked basic questions about individuals general cooking and eating habits. An example is: During a typical week, how many nights do you have a meal prepared at a restaurant (either eat-in or take-out)? This information would later be used to compare what is exhibited during the interview process in order to build triangulation through the use of multiple methodologies (4).

The interviews were semi-structured thirty-minute interviews that were digitally recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Questions were developed through a cohort of researchers based on information collected in the Vermonter Poll and were designed to be open-ended and non-directive in order to ensure that responses would not be biased by the researcher.

The final method was completed by videotaping the preparation of two dinner meals at the participant's home. The videotapes were primarily completed as part of a larger study but did provide another source of data through the unstructured dialogue that was occurring throughout each video. The videos were primarily completed after the interview and allowed for another opportunity to further discuss topics in the interview or to be able to discuss cooking and eating in an informal environment. At this point in the study, rapport had been established with the participant and often they would be willing to share more information about their cooking and eating habits with the researcher as the

research process continued. This provided another resource of information to compare with information from the interviews, thus adding to the validity of the research process.

The research was analyzed similarly to the constant comparison method where “investigators systemically categorize the data and limit theorizing until patterns in the data emerge from the categorizing operation” (5). Categorizing is an ongoing process during the research until there is enough evidence to support each theme and this is known as category saturation (5). The methodology provided the necessary information for the researcher in order to make some conclusions about why people make the choice to eat outside the home and what the roles of restaurants are in society. These two topics will be discussed in-depth in the following pages.

Reasons that individuals eat outside the home will be discussed first in the following pages. For the purposes of this study, the definition of eating out will be “taking of food in some location other than one’s own place of residence.” (1) This is a broad definition, but will include all food prepared and purchased outside the home kitchen, with the exception of meals prepared by friends and family. This allows for the complete relationship that participants have with commercialized eating to be exposed.

Through semi-structured qualitative interviews focused on eating outside the home a number of emergent themes arose showing the reasons individuals eat outside of the home. In general, the themes that explain why participants make the choice to eat outside the home include time poverty, energy poverty, and finding a variety of foods to consume. These themes as well as a few others will be considered individually as well as altogether in terms of determining if there is a way to better understand how people make

the choice to eat out. The underlying issue in this section is to determine the dynamic between making the choice to cook dinner at home or go out to eat. This study hopes to show that there is more to eating outside the home than just finding nourishment from food.

The second topic, understanding the role of the restaurant in society, will be explained in the context of the many ways participants utilize restaurants as a social medium. A few of these functions include restaurants functioning as meeting places, places for entertainment, and places to learn about new foods. These functions represent how culturally important restaurants are in our society and that going out for a meal at a restaurant is about much more than the nourishment provided. The underlying issue in this section is to understand the shift in the perception of the functions of restaurants.

This research will serve as a resource for thinking about public health issues, the role of restaurants in society, and the ability of individuals to be able to eat with their overall health in mind in an otherwise “obesogenic” environment. Overall, thinking about all of these different areas should show that eating outside the home represents more than finding nourishment from one meal.

The Rise of the Food Industry

In order to understand the relationship Americans have with the food environment outside the home, it is important to first look at how the food industry grew to what it is today. Since 1939, sales for foods eaten outside the home have increased from 19.2% of total food sales to 48.8% today (6). Even more importantly, the proportion of these sales

coming from fast food restaurants has increased from 7.1% to 37.4% (7). What this means is that as Americans were eating out more often over time, they were choosing to go to restaurants that typically offer less nutrient-dense foods. It is also estimated that the percentage of calories eaten outside the home has increased from 18% in the mid-1970s to 32% by the mid-1990s (8).

The increase in outside the home eating has shown tremendous growth over time especially as obesity has become a major public health issue in America, however, there is no causal link between eating outside the home and obesity. Despite the knowledge that there are seemingly endless contributing factors to obesity including genetics, behavior, environment, culture, and socioeconomic status (9) the restaurant industry has often been associated with being the main cause of obesity. Eating outside the home certainly does come with a variety of temptations and risks that can lead to weight gain, however, restaurants have come to represent a lot more than danger zones for eating in our society during the past century.

Currently, the average American consumes approximately 200 meals per year that are prepared outside the home and 9% of consumers eat dinner out more than three times per week (2, 10). Food sales outside the home continue to grow every year, as of 2007 food sales outside the home had grown to \$510 billion which represented 48.8% of all food expenditures coming from 945,000 different food and beverage places in America. (7, 11, 12). This number has grown exponentially over time from less than \$3 billion and 19.7% in 1939 (7, 11). This growth raises the question: how have restaurants been able to become such a vital part of the food environment and everyday food choices?

Stroebe (2) has summarized a number of the reasons why Americans increased their eating outside the home over time, thus increasing the demand for restaurants. The first reason is because women have consistently been entering the workforce over time (2). Having more women in the workforce has increased the demand for commercially prepared meals because they no longer have the time to prepare meals seven days a week (2). Another factor is the introduction of technological innovations like vacuum packaging, improved preservatives, deep-freezing, and microwaves over time (2). These innovations allow restaurants as well as companies to be able to move food to the consumer safely and quickly and without a great additional cost to the producer. A third reason is the massive amounts of advertising spending by the food industry in order to ensure that new products are recognized and purchased by Americans (2). It is estimated that the restaurant industry spends \$10 billion per year on advertising, and that 18% of all advertisements are related to food (2, 10). Being able to fund major advertising campaigns has given the food industry the opportunity to entice people to rely on convenience foods rather than their own cooking. Finally, Stroebe (2) suggests that the industrialization of the food industry has led to low-cost foods that are very affordable to most consumers. These reasons represent only a fraction of the reasons why the restaurant industry has grown, but these factors have allowed for a cultural shift from preparing meals at home to relying on others to prepare meals.

Why do individuals eat outside the home?

This next section will focus on the results from this research specifically concerning why individuals make the choice to eat outside the home. Although each of the following themes are separated and discussed in-depth alone, it is recognized that all these themes represent a full system of ideas that cannot realistically be considered individually without considering all other themes at the same time. Food choices have the tendency to work in a systemic manner with all decisions impacting each other.

On the surface, it seems that one would go out to eat simply to find nourishment. This is the obvious end result of eating food prepared in a fast-food restaurant, a bar, or a five-star restaurant, but it does not fully represent all the factors involved in eating a meal outside the home. According to Warde et al. (1) “eating out seems to be expanding as a form of entertainment and a means to display taste, status, and distinction.” This shows that eating outside the home is about more than just the actual act of eating. The following themes and subsequent discussions will exhibit some of the factors involved in making the choice to eat outside the home.

Time

The first theme that arises in the research relates to the issue of schedules, commitments, and ultimately the amount of time that individuals feel they have during the day. On a typical night, 50% of Americans cite “took little time/planning” as a main reason why they cooked what they did for dinner (10). During preliminary research

through the locally based Vermonter-poll, individuals were asked the following: *Does the amount of time you have to cook influence how often you go out to restaurants?* The results showed that 29.9% of 301 individuals felt that not having enough cooking time would influence their choice to eat outside of the home. Of the participants interviewed in Burlington, Vermont, a variety of issues arose relating to eating outside the home and the issue of time.

“My work schedule during the school year is always a little whack. You know, I may not make it home for dinner maybe two nights a week, maybe three nights a week, and then I eat at UVM.” [50s Caucasian male, Burlington]

Having jobs and working long hours suggests a cultural issue in the importance of work over nourishment and meals. In a study by Mancino (14) it was found that full-time workers would spend 38-46 minutes preparing a meal whereas part-time workers spent 53-56 minutes preparing a meal. This shows that having a more flexible schedule can allow individuals to set aside more time to cook a meal, whereas having less time may lead to eating out more often in order to accommodate hectic schedules.

When considering cooking versus eating outside the home, Mancino (14) also noted that the “supply of time spent in preparing food is determined by the price of inputs, wages, household income, and other individual and household characteristics.” The participant mentioned above was someone who was in the highest income bracket, therefore having more disposable income may have a connection to eating outside the home more often. His work schedule, the importance of his job, and being able to keep the same salary are enough reason for him to skip preparing and eating a number of meals at home with his family. Going along with this idea, Mancino (14) found that with a 10%

increase in income people in America spend 4% more on food away from home and only 1% more on food prepared at home. Based on Mancino's research and many others it is clear that eating outside the home more often is often considered a luxury that can be enjoyed more often with more income. This further supports the idea that a higher income may lead to eating outside the home more often and cooking less often or for a shorter amount of time.

The notion that time and work influence eating outside the home is also supported by a participant whose relationship to restaurants transformed when she changed jobs.

She said:

"So I would say, well so and the difference of course being the accessibility of downtown, again, I would blow right through Church Street on my way home and working at a non-profit job, I would routinely be getting out of work at seven or eight o'clock at night and just be too fried to cook, so, I would say an average week I was eating out probably three nights a week." [20s Caucasian female, Burlington]

At the time of the interview this participant had recently changed to a job where she worked a shorter day in a different section of town, finishing usually by 5 o'clock. This change in work indirectly influenced her to eat outside the home less often. She reported eating out only 1-2 times per week when filling out her questionnaire for the study compared to the three times she mentioned in this passage. This supports the idea that having a more flexible schedule and having the opportunity to be done with work at or during a mealtime may lead to fewer meals eaten outside the home. The consequences related to an individual's frequency of meal preparation is a subject of much debate in this field.

Short (15) suggests that the decrease in cooking in the home and increased reliance on foods that are conveniently purchased or prepared outside the home may be contributing to “deskilling of domestic cooking.” Although this may be the case because of the ability to supplement prepared meals in order to save time, other researchers have suggested that cooking skills are continuously changing based on the food environment around people (16). One particular example from the study in terms of cooking habits exhibits how cooking skills may change more slowly than making the choice to eat outside the home.

Despite the fact that this participant was able to cook more often, she was still reliant on convenience foods to supplement her meals. In one meal preparation, she used a *Thai Kitchen* stir-fry rice noodle kit that came with all necessary ingredients except for the vegetables that she added into it. Despite her decrease in frequency of eating out, she was not necessarily cooking from scratch more often than in the past. It is likely that her cooking habits did not change even with more time to cook (she was getting home at five o’clock instead of eight o’clock) because she had been cooking so late at night for a number of years. A shift in cooking practice likely takes much longer to occur than a shift in eating out at restaurants. Despite what researchers think about the debate over cooking skills and convenience foods, the subject of time and schedules certainly has impacted modern trends in cooking.

With all participants, the ones that had seemingly less busy schedules were also able to cook on a more regular basis. For example, a 67 year-old retired woman that was interviewed was able to cook dinner seven nights per week and would only eat out when

she was on vacation or when she had plans that interfered with regular meal times (which was only 1-2 times per month). This idea is further supported in Mancino's (14) study where it was found that age had a significant positive effect on time spent preparing food, probably because these folks are retired or have less time-consuming jobs. It is also possible that eating out was not as common when older individuals were growing up which could lead to the notion that an individual should cook meals more often than not. Research by Nielson (17) supports that the elderly eat a smaller proportion of their calories outside the home compared to younger adults. This participant ate out less often than any other participant in the study, showing that eating out is ubiquitously part of any American's diet. It is just a matter of how integrated it is into one's daily individual eating habits.

A final study that further supports the issue of time by Larson, et al. (18) found that "The most common barrier to food preparation was lack of time, reported by 36% of young adults." The implications of how work and life schedules impact the decision to eat outside the home are complex and difficult to control and are particularly individualized based on each person's lifestyle. Despite the individuality of schedules, the one common trend seen was that when people planned meals ahead of time, they were less likely to eat out regardless of their schedules.

Balancing Cost and Convenience with Energy as a Driving Force

Cost and convenience are two important factors to consider when people are eating outside the home. On one hand, people that have income limitations are likely to control the amount that they eat outside the home compared to eating at home in order to meet their food budget. On the other hand, convenience gives many people reason to eat outside the home more often because of the availability and ability to save time when eating out. When an individual feels that they do not have the energy or feels they are too busy to prepare a meal, this adds additional enticement that can play into the balance of cost and convenience when making the choice to eat out. This represents the complexity in being able to understand the balance between cost and convenience. Not only is there the food that is purchased and consumed, but there are also other factors, like how much energy a person has, how busy they feel they are, and wanting to use their time in other ways. These individualized factors are completely separate from the importance of finding nourishment in a meal outside the home. In this section, three variables: cost, convenience, and energy will be discussed individually and then together as implicating factors in the choice to eat outside the home.

Cost is a driving factor in food choices. According to Glanz, (19) cost is second to only the taste of food as a driving factor behind food choices and outweighs the importance of nutrition and weight control. According to Fogel, (20) 51% of people in a survey agreed that “it costs more to eat healthy foods” especially when out at a restaurant. When making a purchase outside the home, not only is an individual purchasing a meal for nourishment they are also purchasing the convenience of not having to cook.

According to Nickols, et al. (21) consumers that make the choice not to cook in order to have more leisure time are called “time-buying consumers” because they are willing to spend additional money in order to not have to cook (21). Most participants in this study cited in their survey that they ate dinner outside the home less than two times per week. The main reason they did not eat out more often is because of the cost associated with it.

“I just look at it most of the time and go, it’s a lot of money to eat out and then if I order something and I’m disappointed in it, I go, oh I could have made that, at home.”
[67-year old Caucasian female, Burlington]

This participant recognizes the risk of being disappointed when going out for a meal. Despite the convenience of going out to eat, she knows from past experiences there is a chance she could be disappointed with the quality or flavor of the food. This risk of having a poor meal is something that she weighs in her mind when deciding if eating outside the home is worth the cost and risk associated with it. Another participant expresses why he does not eat outside the home more often than he does:

“I like places to go out to eat that are casual and not overly expensive. For me that’s why it is easy to eat at home.” [56 year-old Caucasian male, Burlington]

For this participant, he recognizes that the meals he prefers are also easy for him to prepare and are comparable to the types of meals that he gets outside the home so he prefers to make them himself rather than spend additional money having it made for him. This participant was very aware of the added cost of eating out, which was one of his reasons for maintaining a garden large enough to support his family with fresh vegetables and herbs for the entire summer. He had three separate gardening areas as well as chickens for eggs in order to decrease the overall cost of his food. For this person, preparing a meal involved a great deal of energy because he often had to leave the

kitchen in order to gather vegetables or herbs based on where he was in the cooking process. This high level of energy required to prepare a meal may have contributed to him still eating outside the home a few times a month because he knew when preparing a meal how long it could take just to gather ingredients.

Not having enough energy to prepare a meal is not something that comes up often in the literature, but is an important factor. Ahlgren, et al. (22) found through a questionnaire with 400 participants that many people prepare ready to eat meals because they are too tired or do not have time to prepare a meal. One participant in this study had a chest freezer in her garage to keep prepared foods like salmon burgers and frozen tortellini that she purchased from *Costco* readily available in case she ever needed to prepare a meal that was last minute or involved additional guests besides her and her husband. In addition, Warde et al. (1) found that many people make the choice to eat outside the home on Friday nights because they were too tired to cook. For some people, even getting dressed up to go out for a meal involved too much energy, therefore they ended up just getting take-out (1). Finally, Ahlgren, et al. (22) also determined that lack of energy is a convenience related reason for eating a ready to eat meal rather than preparing a meal from scratch. The following examples from the interviews highlight some of the instances where energy was a determining factor in deciding what to have for dinner.

Table 7 : Energy Threshold When Eating Outside the Home _____

“I would routinely be getting out of work at seven or eight o’clock at night and just be too fried to cook.” [20s Caucasian female, Burlington]

“I’m lucky because I do have, my husband and my kids, if I come home and I don’t feel like cooking, they’re happy with a pizza” [40s Caucasian female, Boston]

“Let’s say I got home late and I just don’t feel like cooking or sometimes you’re like, oh I could go for some Indian, then yeah.” [30s Trinidadian female, Boston]

In all of these examples, the participant expresses their lack of energy at the end of the day because of whatever events occurred throughout the day, and as a result, they would rather not cook. All of these examples connect back to the issue of time and that if any of these participants finish with their day’s activities after a certain time, they feel that it is too late to begin preparing a meal. In addition, these passages represent the freedom to not cook that can be given to the primary meal preparer in the home if they have the resources to eat outside the home. Although the threshold of energy that is needed by a person to still feel like they can prepare a particular meal is individualized, it is a factor in the balance of cost and convenience in meal choice. The convenience of eating out will be discussed next.

“When convenience is a main factor influencing away-from-home food choices, consumers are 17 percent more likely to purchase fast food” (8). The convenience of eating outside the home is one of the common reasons that people forgo cooking and go out for a meal. Stewart, et al. (8) found that convenience is a top-three attribute after taste and nutrition when ranking what is important when eating out for most Americans.

Participants in this study also indirectly cited convenience as a reason for eating outside the home. The following two examples exhibit this idea:

*“I think that eating out also obviously its just so easy, its really easy.”
[20s Caucasian female, Burlington]*

*“If we’re home I cook but it depends if we’re out at the mall so you just grab something while you’re out there or if my son has a baseball game we might be there all day and they’re starving then they grab something, so it depends on what the activities are.”
[50s Caucasian female, Boston]*

The woman in the second passage is a mother of two that finds that when activities keep them out of the house during a mealtime they will often go out to eat because it is just more convenient and easily accessible. This suggests that often times if a restaurant is easily accessible, either because it is in a person’s transportation route, it is close to their home, or it is close to an activity that they are participating in, then it is more tempting to make the choice to eat outside the home. An interesting factor that arises here is that if there is always a restaurant conveniently located nearby, there will always be the temptation to eat outside the home. For this particular family, being able to act as a “time-buyer” allows them to be able to participate in family related activities at their own leisure. This also allows them to focus on the family activity, whether it is a baseball game or going to the mall, instead of being concerned with making it home to be able to prepare a meal. This respondent indirectly expresses the importance of being able to have the flexibility to be able to eat outside the home when it is not convenient to be cooking a meal.

In order for a meal purchased from outside the home to be convenient, it must also be in close proximity when that individual wants a particular meal. Current research

has been investigating the possible link between obesity and proximity to restaurants. According to an article in the Los Angeles Times, a study done by UC Berkeley and Columbia found that having a fast-food restaurant within 530 feet of a school resulted in a 5.2% increase in the possibility of becoming obese (20). The reason that researchers have been able to suggest this link is because foods outside the home have the tendency to be higher in fat, saturated fat, and calories and lower in fruits, vegetables, and fibers (24, 25).

In addition, a study by Austin, et al. (26) found that fast-food restaurants have the tendency to be clustered around schools, especially in large cities, and this can expose children to a poor-quality food environment at a young age. This shows that there is a possible link between proximity of restaurants and the frequency of eating out to public health issues. This connection was seen in the participants regardless of their overall eating habits.

A final example of proximity and convenience leading to eating outside the home comes from the young woman mentioned earlier regarding her shift in jobs as being a factor for eating outside the home less. She had mentioned in that same passage the “accessibility of downtown...I would blow through Church Street on my way home” when working at a non-profit job as being a reason it was so convenient for her to eat out when she felt too tired to cook. For her, having a number of restaurants available on her route of travel led to her eating outside the home more than she would have without the availability of restaurants. In addition, finishing work late in the evening and not feeling like she had the energy contributed to the temptation to eat out.

Overall, the convenience as well as proximity of restaurants has an impact on the choice to eat outside the home. The CDC has labeled the food environment outside the home as obesogenic meaning that it is “characterized by environments that promote increased food intake, nonhealthful foods, and physical inactivity” (27). What this means is that constantly being tempted by convenient and accessible foods could have negative health implications. If this is the case, then needing to balance convenience with cost is essential when making the choice to eat outside the home. Unfortunately, obesity levels continue to rise and this may be partly because the convenience and ability to choose not to cook because of a lack of energy has outweighed the cost of eating outside the home for many people. There is still no causal link between eating outside the home and obesity, but there seems to be a connection based on previous research. Before restaurants experienced such expansive growth thinking about convenience and cost with energy as an implication was probably not a factor because commercially produced foods were not ubiquitously available. Today, however, this must be explicitly considered when determining why people eat outside the home. This discussion of making the choice to eat outside the home will now shift to understanding some of the ways that individuals utilize restaurants and how that may influence their choice not to cook in a given night.

Recreating Foods Eaten Outside the Home

“I was so psyched to come home and try it, and then I tried and I’m saying, huh, how close is that to what it is down there.”

[50s Caucasian male, Burlington]

Many participants in this study talked about trying to recreate meals that they had out at restaurants in order to make a food that they really enjoy without having to actually go and get it or pay additional money to have it prepared for them. This is the first example of how participants use the food environment around them as a resource. A second example of someone recreating meals follows:

“If I went out to dinner last week and there was a salad I liked and I want to make that salad, I will make that salad and that may take a little longer.”

[30s Caucasian female, Boston]

The issue that arises for a lot of people is determining whether or not they can actually recreate the same flavors and tastes that are found at a restaurant. For this woman, the barrier to recreating foods is the extra time that it takes to prepare a meal similar to what she had outside the home. For other people, a different barrier to recreating a meal from a restaurant may be because it involves a complex or messy process. For example,

“I have never really fried much food at home. To have all that oil, its just too messy, just don’t want to bother with it, but that’s how you make it.”

[50s Caucasian male, Burlington]

For other people, recreating foods they had outside the home is just not worth the effort. The following woman is discussing her relationship to cooking and she says

“I love chicken satay but you will not see me trying to recreate that.”

[30s Trinidadian female, Boston]

In the first excerpt in this section the participant is wondering after recreating “Buddha Beef” from a local Chinese restaurant “*how close it is to down there.*” So even for people that do try to recreate meals that they have out at restaurants and are able to overcome some of the barriers, they often find that “*something was definitely missing*” [30s Trinidadian female, Boston] or that restaurants “will share but they leave out that one thing.” [30s Trinidadian female, Boston]

The importance of this is that the foods that people are eating outside the home are influencing their choices and practices at home. People today accept restaurants as a resource for new ideas for meals to prepare at home. A final example of this comes from a woman in her forties living in Boston:

“Sometimes I’ll have something in a restaurant and I’ll think I have to figure out how to do this.”

[40s Caucasian female, Boston]

Using restaurants as a resource might explain part of the reason why participants were consistently looking for new and different foods when they made the choice to not cook and eat outside the home. This tendency represents the increase in diversity in meal options that Americans have today. In the long run getting ideas from restaurants for home-cooked could lead to more cooking at home as people expand their repertoire of meals they can prepare. In this particular situation, recreating foods may represent an aspiration to prepare foods that represent a particular lifestyle that the participant is interested in. Historically, eating at restaurants has been interconnected to social class and status in society, however, this is much more often the case today. Often in the past, families only went out to eat because of special occasions or emergencies (28).

According to Hurley, (29) “Until the late 1940s, working class families rarely took meals away from home unless they had to.” The changes that are seen in the use of restaurants for status and which may ultimately lead to individuals to try to prepare foods at home is well exhibited by the history of the diner.

After World War II restaurants went through a significant demographic shift from catering to single men to catering to families (29). This occurred as a result of the increase of women in the labor force which resulted in less overall time for domestic work (29). Before World War II, there were few restaurants for the middle class; most restaurants were either hash houses or upscale restaurants. During the 1950s, however, diners began to try to lure families to eat out in order to have a break from cooking and try foods that were otherwise considered exotic (29). The success that diners had in luring in families lead to rapid growth in family oriented food operations, especially fast-food restaurants during the 1960s and 1970s (29). The expansion of the food industry allowed for the appearance of restaurants that suite many different classes and brought foods that were otherwise considered exotic to the forefront of American cuisine. This allowed for people to represent what class they consider themselves to be a part of. This may explain why individuals currently are so interested in recreating foods that they have at restaurants. They may be trying to exhibit their status and distinction in their home cooking through making food that they eat from a restaurant that is related to their aspirations about social class. This phenomenon may also involve the enjoyment of new or different foods or simply being able to eat a variety of different foods. This idea will be discussed next.

New & Different Foods

“I think I’m a pretty, pretty innovative cook, but um, there’s something about going out and uh, you know, trying something different, that I don’t have at home usually.”
[60s Caucasian female, Burlington]

Trying new and different foods when eating outside the home was surprisingly important to participants. With the high level of availability of foods that Americans have and the excessive number of calories available, (2,680 per capita per day) (2) it is becoming apparent that individuals currently expect choices and variety in everything that is available to eat in the food environment. The first excerpt in this section touched on the idea that even though this participant feels capable of making meals at home on a regular basis, she looks to restaurants to fill a need for foods that are different from what she normally makes. When asked why a different participant chose to eat at restaurants, this person responded, *“it is the taste and the variety of food that attracts me to the restaurant.”* [30s Russian female, Burlington] Another participant describes what they are looking for in restaurants with a little more depth:

“That it is going to be maybe something that I have never had before. High quality ingredients, fresh ingredients that you know, again, creativity, that goes back to something I might not have had before.”
[20s Caucasian female, Burlington]

This participant added another layer to her expectations for restaurants. Not only is she looking for something that she has never had before, but she expects that it will be made keeping her personal preferences in mind. The concept that people enjoy trying new foods is called neophilia (30). Kim et al. (30) found that people look to try new foods because it is a means of “increasing sensation and pleasure” but that there are

usually just as many people that are neophobic because they do not enjoy trying new foods (30). Based on the fact that so many people in this study expressed their enjoyment of trying new foods it seems that as a result of the advances in the variety and quality of foods in the food environment outside the home, that Americans are more neophilic than in the past.

On the surface this seems like a simple benefit of the food industry and the success of restaurants. The ability for restaurants to create exciting and new flavors in order to entice people really has a lot of people addicted to restaurant eating which may be a contributing factor in public health issues. According to Stroebe, (2) the average American eats two-hundred meals outside the home and estimates that seventy-five percent of these meals are from fast-food restaurants. In addition, research by McCrory, et al. (31) shows that there is a positive association between the variety of entrees available to an individual and body fatness in men and women. So the variety of food as well as tastes and flavors may be leading to some poor eating habits in America. A final example of the theme of new and different foods also leads into the next theme titled capability thresholds in making the choice to eat outside the home:

“I look for, the variety of what I either don’t know how to prepare at home or just kind of too lazy to prepare at home.”

[20s Caucasian female, Burlington]

Threshold of Capability

Through responses in the interviews, it was determined that participants had a built-in threshold of capability as well as energy output (discussed earlier) when preparing regular meals. If the food that they wanted for dinner that night was beyond

either of their personal thresholds of energy or capability they decided not to cook and go out for a meal. The following section provides a number of examples of passages that exhibit the capability threshold in terms of cooking particular foods.

Table 8 : Capability Threshold When Eating Outside the Home_____

“So I really love Indian and I feel like I’d [like] to cook more Indian food but it’s something that I’m not that familiar with cooking. I grew up eating it but not making it. So I’m still kind of venturing into that arena.” [30s Caucasian female, Middlebury]

“I don’t try at all to make Thai food, I order Thai food almost every Friday, quite a bit. I love chicken satay but you will not see me trying to recreate that.” [30s Trinidadian female, Boston]

“There’s flavors when I go out some places that I get that I can’t, that I have not tried to make at home.” [50s Caucasian male, Burlington]

In these passages, there is an emergent theme that participants desire certain foods that they might not feel comfortable preparing at home. In these particular examples, there is also a recurring theme that foods from ethnicities different from their own represent foods that they enjoy eating but may not feel like they are capable of recreating. Although there seems to be a desire to be able to recreate these foods at home, there is not overwhelming pressure to do so, because the restaurant that provides this particular food to them is always available when they are craving that particular food. These participants may possess the skills necessary to create these foods, but they have not had the exposure to the process to be able to confidently cook these things at home. Based on this idea found in the research, the process each of the participants goes through when

deciding what they want for dinner is to try to evaluate their ability and level of energy and whether or not the food that they want fits into their own personal parameters. Then they have to choose to either make it themselves or have it prepared for them outside the home. In the case of ethnic foods, more often than not individuals will choose to purchase those foods from a restaurant. The history behind this trend will be discussed next through the growth of Chinese restaurants.

The presence of foods from other ethnicities and from other cultures is certainly not new to American society. According to Barbas, (32) between 1870 and 1930 Chinese cuisine appeared and was able to thrive as a food eaten outside the home because it was something considered “exotic” or “oriental” and allowed non-Chinese Americans to be able to experience Chinese culture despite current cultural tensions. Even with Chinese restaurants known for their unattractive atmosphere, they grew rapidly in the early 1900s with the appearance of a Chinese-American dish called “chop suey.” Many Americans became addicted to this food as it represented something entirely new and different from their usual meals. Since chop suey was new and different from their usual meals, most Americans never learned how to prepare this food, and instead relied on their local Chinese eatery to prepare it for them. This example shows how it often is not important to Americans to learn how to prepare a particular food because they can rely on someone else to prepare it. Not learning how to prepare certain cuisines of food can limit the level of capability that someone has in their home meal preparation. This desire for one particular new and different food is a likely contributing factor to the growth of the restaurant industry, especially with foods that are considered exotic or out of the

ordinary. This desire seems to have continued for almost an entire century, with participants in this study exhibiting their continued desire to try foods that are new and different. As a result of these foods seeming so new and different compared to what an individual eats on a regular basis, a feeling of inability arises when thinking about recreating these foods at home.

Eating Out Without Rules

Most participants made the connection that there can be negative health implications to eating outside the home. This was primarily due to the fact that they would no longer be the nutritional gatekeeper for the food that they are eating. A nutritional gatekeeper is the person in each household that controls what food the rest of the family is eating (33). A first example of this connection comes from an older woman who describes eating outside the home in the context of the health of meals she gets outside the home:

“I think just the sauces and the things that they use and I think ignorance is bliss, you know, if I don’t know how much butter they put in it, you know, and uh, all that, then I just [do] things that I just probably wouldn’t do here.”
[60s Caucasian female, Burlington]

In this passage, she recognizes that she no longer has control over what is going into her foods, and that it is okay to not know or else she probably would not eat that food. She also recognizes that there is a difference in the way that she controls the health of the food she eats at home versus out at a restaurant. She seems to have a set of rules and regulations that she follows while at home in order to maintain what she would

consider to be a healthy meal. When she goes out to eat, however, these rules seem to be different or not present, and as a result she will order things that do not fit into her rules.

Another example comes from a Trinidadian woman living in Boston:

“Also I find when we cook, it’s a balanced meal, when I take out, I’m not paying attention so much to getting a salad, and getting a vegetable.”

[30s Trinidadian female, Boston]

For this woman, she also seems to experience a shift in her eating habits when going out to eat. She values balance in her meals that she prepares at home, often trying to make sure that she has a salad and vegetable involved in her meals. When she goes out to eat, however, she does not think about these things nearly as often and may not be eating these foods as often when eating outside the home. A final example of this comes from a graduate student living in Boston who is expressing her feelings about the health of the food that she is eating outside the home:

“It’s usually crap. I’m always a little frustrated because where I live I feel like the options aren’t real great and if I do want a little healthier option, it’s even that much more expensive so I get trapped in this do I eat healthy or do I spend money or where do I go.” [30s Caucasian female, Boston]

For this woman, she is trying to balance cost with the health of the foods that she eats outside the home. More often than not, she chooses the cheaper food that she considers to be less healthy overall. Her particular example was choosing what she thought was the less healthy “burrito for under \$5” rather than getting the more healthy sushi. She expresses that choosing one over the other represents her “healthy versus expense trade off.” In this case, she is someone who eats outside the home very often, and expresses the frequency as “more than I’d like to both financially and health wise.” What this means is that for her she does not necessarily compare the health of meals that

she prepares at home to those she eats outside the home. What she does instead is to compare the different meals that she eats outside the home and recognizes that she often chooses what she feels to be the less healthy option.

What this means is that participants recognize the possibility of making poor food choices outside the home, and yet they still have the tendency to choose the less healthy option. Perhaps it is because they enjoy the taste or flavor of these foods or they feel that once in a while it is ok, but either way they are choosing the food they consider to be less healthy. When preparing meals for themselves and their families, these individuals control what is going in their foods and they stick to some set of personal rules as the nutritional gatekeeper. On the other hand, when going out for meals these rules are neglected or are different altogether. This exhibits the idea that eating out is about more than nourishment because there is clearly a number of other factors that influence a person to eat out, especially when they know what they are eating may not be good for their health.

Social

The last but most powerful emergent theme in this research was the idea that social situations lead a person to make the choice to eat outside the home. This theme represents both a reason that people make the choice to eat out as well as a function of restaurants. A first example of the social theme comes from a graduate student in Boston that explains her reasoning for eating outside the home:

“I’d say it’s probably 75% of the time involved with a social event so it’s enjoying the meal with friends out.”

[20s Caucasian female, Boston]

This young woman is able to pinpoint that the majority of the time that she eats outside the home is because of social events rather than any other reason. She is using the social aspect in the context of spending time with friends or family. She even goes on to explain that:

“I’m a real sucker too, if a friend calls me and says [they] want to go grab a bite to eat, even if I’ve just cooked dinner, I’ll probably be like, sure because it’s a social connection.”

[20s Caucasian female, Boston]

She is explaining that even if she just spent time and money creating a meal for herself at home, that she is willing to waste the food because the social connections she can make with people while in a restaurant are more important to her than eating meals she prepared for herself.

Another participant explains that eating outside the home is even part of her teenage boys activities with their friends, so she has to “think about do I need to prepare a meal” when she knows they will be eating out with friends and it is just going to be her and her husband eating dinner. For her, she has to decide if she feels it is worth her time and energy to create a meal when she knows it will just be her and her husband eating the meal rather than the whole family.

Another young woman describes the context of the social aspect in another way:

“There is also the social aspect where everybody wants to go where they feel comfortable.”

[30s Russian female, Burlington]

She is using the context of the social aspect in terms of how restaurant choices are made rather than as the context of making the choice to eat outside the home. This shows

that she does not necessarily consider eating out at restaurants just for being with people, but rather for the purpose of creating a welcoming and comfortable environment for all of the people she is spending time with.

Another way that eating out at restaurants has a social context is that eating out at restaurants is often used as a form of entertainment for participants. One participant describes it in the following way:

“Its an activity. Its like, ah, can we get take-out? Its like wow can we go to the zoo? It’s got this exciting [feeling] to me like, and it also always happens on a day when like, I don’t want to cook everyday.”

[20s Caucasian female, Burlington]

She goes on to explain that the excitement that she can order food and it will come to her house still has not worn off and that despite her value of cooking as often as possible, she still enjoys getting food outside the home. Another participant describes eating out as entertainment in another way:

“I think, in my relationship now we tend to would routinely would have at least one night out during the winter months just to kind of get out of the house.”

[20s Caucasian female, Burlington]

For this participant, going out for a meal tends to break the monotony of their busy schedule and gives them a chance to spend time together outside the home. A final example of eating out as entertainment comes from a working mother who describes a recent experience with her family:

“It’s fun, and um, like last weekend we went to Three Tomatoes, we sat on Church Street, we felt like we were on vacation, kids were great, everybody had a good time.”

[40s Caucasian female, Burlington]

In this case, the participant suggests one of the aspects of eating out that is really tempting for many of the participants in this study. Eating outside the home is really about more than the food itself. The physical environment that is surrounding people at restaurants and the emotions that are associated with this feeling show that eating out at a restaurant can be more of a leisure activity than a nourishment activity.

A final context of the social aspect of eating out at restaurants has to do with using restaurants as a place for celebrating important events in life. Rarely through the course of the interviews did people talk about regularly having dinner parties or celebrations at their homes. Instead, many explained that one of their primary reasons for eating outside the home was “when there’s usually something special going on.” An example of a special celebration as being a reason to eat outside the home was:

“My daughter is doing an Ameri-corps job out in Oregon. She came back last, a week ago tomorrow, is that right? Yeah, probably. When she came back into town we went to Tiny Thai for dinner. She likes Tiny Thai, it was sort of a cool thing that she is back in town, sort of celebratory kind of thing.”

[50s Caucasian male, Burlington]

In this passage, he expresses that they chose to eat outside the home because they were celebrating that his daughter was back home. This example came from the same individual who earlier expressed that he preferred cooking at home more often than not because he preferred casual and not overly expensive foods that he could easily make himself. Despite his consistent cooking practices, when something important is going on, he prefers to go out to eat. Another participant explains how eating outside the home is celebratory for her:

“Then whenever we go out to eat, it’s a lets celebrate, like lets really like, we don’t go out to eat and go to McDonalds, we go out to eat when we want to make a night of it. We plan a lot of time, and plan to spend some money and get good food.”

[30s Caucasian female, Burlington]

She expresses her context of celebrating more as making eating out a celebration in itself rather than needing some other event to plan around. Based on the use of restaurants as social, entertainment, and celebratory places for people to go, one has to wonder if this is necessarily a good or bad thing. From a public health perspective there is the possibility of negative health implications. According to Weber, et al. (34) “Social interaction has consistently been demonstrated to increase food intake in humans, which is attributed to a variety of factors such as increased emotionality, modeling behavior and meal duration.”

When thinking about the celebratory, entertainment, as well as social reasons for eating outside the home, one has to go back to thinking about why this relationship does not or no longer exists in the home kitchen. Future researchers should try to understand why people no longer feel that the home is no longer an acceptable environment for people to have company or celebrate in? This is a question that has a number of possible answers, but would require explicit consideration in order to hypothesize grounded theory for this.

Food Choices

After looking at the emergent themes from this research, it was important to take the findings one step further and come up with a broad way to understand how people make the choice to not cook and instead eat outside the home. The goal of this analysis

was to try to find an already existent model in the scientific world that could be used in a broad way to analyze a group of participants based on the decisions that each individual makes.

In order to understand the choice to eat out it is important to understand the cognitive decision-making process when it comes to making an individual food choice. Understanding general food choice is a logical first step in trying to understand if people make the choice to eat outside the home in a similar way to an individual food choice. Being able to find these connections will allow for future researchers to be able to create models that characterize how people make the choice to eat outside the home.

There are many theories relating to food choice, but little relating to why people make the choice to eat outside the home. Research by Asp (35) suggests that psychological factors including food preferences, likes and dislikes, and response to sensory characteristics are the most important factors involved in food choice. Other reasons that have come up relating to food choice include current food trends, economic reasons, and biological factors, but little research directly relates to eating outside of the home (35, 36)

In order to critically think about characterizing the choice to eat outside the home, a model following food choice will be utilized in depth. The following model was used during the analysis process to categorize each participant's decision-making process at dinnertime in order to determine which reasons for eating out were mentioned by many participants in the group. The model that will be utilized was developed by Furst, et al. (37) at Cornell in 1996. They developed a conceptual model that compiles many of the

processes that lead up to a food choice. They summarized that three basic things would lead to a food choice: Life Course, Influences, and Personal System (37). The following describes how these three categories work together:

Life course includes the personal roles and the social, cultural and physical environments to which a person has been and is exposed. A person's life course generates a set of influences: ideals, personal factors, resources, social framework and food context. These influences inform and shape people's personal systems, including conscious value negotiations and unconsciously operationalized strategies that may occur in a food-related choice situation (37).

This model provided a basis for understanding if there is any overlap between the process of making food choices and the decision-making process relating to eating outside the home. This model also provides a list of potential factors that may also influence why people eat outside of the home. This model has been successfully used by Falk, et al. (36) to investigate food choices in older adults through qualitative interviewing showing that it is likely a good resource for examining the results from this study to see if the reasons people eat outside the home are similar to the reasons that people make specific food choices.

For this research, this model was used to evaluate the emergent themes from the qualitative interviews in order to determine if Furst, et al.'s food choice model is something that can broadly be used to provide framework for evaluating how an individual makes the choice to eat out. The goal of doing this analysis was to provide an

example of how the emergent themes can be organized into an already existent model, as was stated in the beginning of this section. By matching examples from the current research to the food choice model it becomes possible to evaluate if this model could be used to broadly evaluate the choice to eat outside the home. The following chart provides examples from the current study based on each category included in the conceptual model for food choice. The original model can be seen in appendix A.

Table 9 : Furst, et al. conceptual food model vs. results

	Furst, et al. Conceptual Model	Example(s)
Life Course	Social Environments – How family, friends, and social situations may influence an individual’s current food choices.	<i>“I just never saw my mom loving cooking. I never saw her just love to cook. There were always five of us running around. It was like a military thing. The food was always awesome but I don’t think we truly appreciated what she gave us and now we all do but at the time.”</i> [30s Caucasian female, Boston]
	Cultural Environments – How ethnic background and upbringing may influence an individual’s eating habits.	<i>“I think I was missing my ethnic food, Russian meals, and I tried to make it, and I also tried to expose my family, my American family to what it is like. What the food, what the meals are like in Russia.”</i> [30s Russian female, Burlington]
	Physical Environments – How the environment around people shapes their food choices. This includes both inside the home as well as outside the home.	<i>“I’m really bad with it and part of it I think is because it still exciting to me because I lived in the country until I moved here ten years ago and it hasn’t worn off yet, the fact that you can order food and it will come to you.”</i> [20s Caucasian female,

		Burlington]
Influences	Ideals – What a person strives to be able to do or feels is the “right way.”	<i>“I think I have this ethic, like, you know you should provide for your family kind of thing, and its like well we are not going to do that, we are just going to be sort of bad and you know just go and get it.”</i> [20s Caucasian female, Burlington]
	Personal Factors – Personal preference in food choices, i.e. likes/dislikes, allergies, etc.	<i>“I’m pretty fussy about what take-out I consider. So, if I get prepared foods, its only healthy living or fresh market, sugarsnap, so I want local foods or I want food that’s prepared in a way that I would prepare it.”</i> [40s Caucasian female, Burlington]
	Resources – Includes money, time, equipment, and cooking knowledge as resources.	<i>“They basically think that we’re ridiculous to be spending the portion of our budget that we do on groceries.”</i> [30s Caucasian female, Middlebury]
	Social Framework – Mainly considers the issues that arise in families surrounding food, but also includes workplace context and going to other people’s houses for meals.	<i>“My kids are really picky eaters, which is another thing that is really problematic for sitting down all together. So, I end up making multiple meals.”</i> [40s Caucasian female, Burlington]
	Food Context – This considers the food system, food supply, availability of certain foods and where they shop.	<i>“We actually just went into our first farm-share so I’m trying to get right with having salad every night for example because the amount of lettuce alone is more than just the two of us in the house can eat.”</i> [20s Caucasian female, Burlington]
Personal System (Value	Sensory Perceptions – Taste and flavor as factors in food choice.	<i>“It is the taste and the variety of food that attracts me to the restaurant.”</i>

Negotiations)		[30s Russian female, Burlington]
	Monetary Considerations – Considers the price and perceived value of the food.	<i>“I go out a lot. More than I’d like to both financially and health wise.”</i> [20s Caucasian female, Boston]
	Convenience – Includes ease of access, preparation, as well as the time involved.	<i>“If we happen to be out and its getting late and you know, I know that I’m not going to make it back or I can’t think of what I can throw together quickly, then we are apt to maybe stop.”</i> [60s Caucasian female, Burlington]
	Health & Nutrition – Includes eating in both a beneficial (as nutrients) way as well as in a negative as in weight-gain or disease causing way.	<i>“I did this four month diet last year that was very specific, and was 80% vegetables, and all these guidelines for not eating protein with starch, so I did all these things for four months and it totally changed my relationship to food.”</i> [20s Caucasian female, Burlington]
	Managing Relationships – Accommodating to the tastes and preferences of people around you.	<i>“My son will eat probably five or six different things and that’s it. He eats, uh, organic chicken fingers, and I mean, I have gotten to a point where anything that goes in that kids mouth has got to be, I have to read the label, because he eats so, he is so picky.”</i> [40s Caucasian female, Burlington]
	Quality – This includes quality as a degree of excellence, as a degree of acceptability, and as food prepared at home.	<i>“I was given a recipe for Caesar salad at this place in New Hampshire, very fancy, very expensive restaurant, four, five stars, really good quality food.”</i> [30s Trinidadian female, Boston]

By using examples from the current research project in order to fit them into the different categories of this model it is seen that Furst's model is useful in looking at the decision-making process when individuals make the choice to eat outside the home. Furst, et al. (37) had the main goal of creating a model that would outline the "general nature of food choice" and realized that "certain influences may be more salient than others for particular people in specific food choice situations" (37). Therefore, this food model allows for the interpretation of its use to be manipulated in order to categorize different types of people as well as different areas of food habits. This is why, based on the analysis above, that this model is an appropriate tool for evaluating the choice to eat outside the home.

There would still need to be a few changes in the use of this model in order to make it applicable to this research field. Reasons that arose in this research but not in the model would need to be included. The most specific example would be the thresholds of energy and capability that are not specifically included in the model. These areas are an important process in choosing to eat out and should not be looked over. Also, in order to use this model it would be important to do a pilot study using this model to make sure that it does cover all the necessary areas that factor into making the choice to eat out.

The model could be used to analyze future research in two different ways. First, individual participants could be evaluated based on the different categories that are important to them from the table to be able to map out how they make their own choice to eat outside the home. This would allow researchers to be able to evaluate how different types of people make their choices and if there are any patterns and similarities that arise

with groups of people. This was how the researcher used the model when analyzing the current research. Also, this model could be used to evaluate the data from an entire group in order to determine which areas are most prevalent in making the choice to eat outside the home. This would be beneficial especially in long-term studies as researchers would be able to track changes and shifts in the common reasons that people go out to eat. Both of these strategies would be useful in understanding the choice to eat outside the home.

Conclusion

This research has provided a better understanding for why individuals make the choice to eat outside the home as well as the ways that Americans utilize restaurants. There are so many factors that influence a person to choose not to cook in a given night, most notably being time and social factors, but for every individual interviewed there existed a slightly different set of rules and reasons for eating outside the home, most of which differed from their rules when eating at home.

Based on the research a number of conclusions regarding restaurant eating can be made. This research has undeniably shown that there is more to eating out at restaurants than the nourishment one gains from a meal. Not only are people more concerned with other attributes of a restaurant meal, they are less concerned with the health of the meals they eat out compared to the meals they eat at home. Restaurant eating represents a way to escape from routine and in essence go on a food vacation, where there is little concern over whether or not the food they are eating helps them maintain a healthy overall diet. It is unknown what about the restaurant environment makes people feel like they are on this

so-called food vacation. It could have to do with the variety and diversity of food choices, the ambiance and atmosphere of the restaurant, or it could be as a result of social forces.

As was stated earlier, social reasons were the most important factor when eating out. Based on this, the researcher was able to make a number of conclusions. The social aspect of eating out created a situation where the health and nourishment of the food was not as important as the company included in the meal. Also, eating out at a restaurant provides a social medium that no individual has to feel responsible for maintaining and that everyone can be comfortable in. Finally, the social aspects of going out to a meal can essentially elevate the experience of a meal to greater levels when compared to what participants felt eating at home could do. The social aspect of eating out is the main reason why people are distracted from thinking about the health of the food that they are eating when eating out.

Another conclusion that can be made based on this data is that many Americans feel they do not have enough time to cook so they make the choice to buy their time back by eating outside the home. Many other factors that were discussed ultimately fit into the issue of time. The energy threshold connects to time because of the lack of motivation that people have to cook in a given night if they spent a lot of time at work or arrive back at home late at night. Convenience and cost also fit into the issue of time because many choices are made to eat outside the home when it would take too long to get home and prepare a meal especially when there is a restaurant in close proximity that would be affordable for that person or family. In all cases, time was a major factor in the decision-making process at dinnertime. It does not seem as if this trend will be shifting any time

soon. It is likely that the issue of time will be a factor in making food choices for many years to come. This may be a sign that culturally the dinner meal is not as prioritized as it was in the past. There is no longer a common feeling that families need to be at home eating a home-cooked meal at dinnertime every night of the week.

A final conclusion is that restaurants are currently creating the standard of what is considered good food in America. People go out to eat in order to try new and different foods from what they normally eat and this neophilic tendency is something that continues to grow in America. This tendency has motivated a number of people in this study to take ideas they get from restaurants and create new foods at home. This is a phenomenon that should continue to grow as restaurant culture remains an important part of popular culture. Although this could result in an increase in cooking at home, it will also continue to motivate people to eat out often. This will allow people to fill their need for trying new foods and use restaurants to get new ideas to add to their repertoire of home-cooked meals. This is certainly positive when it comes to increasing cultural exposure and ability to create different foods at home, however the tendency to eat outside the home more often may have negative implications relating to the overall health of an individual. The one main concern that the researcher was left with after considering all the emergent themes takes this conclusion one step further. When people go out to eat they are not concerned with the health of the food that they are eating. If they are taking ideas from restaurants and recreating meals at home there is a possibility that there will be an overall loss in concern over what the individual is eating at home as well. This would be detrimental to the overall health of Americans.

To summarize, eating out at restaurants is engrained into modern society and is something that is utilized by people for a number of different reasons. People use restaurants for a number of functional reasons including saving time, being convenient, and providing nourishment. From a pleasure-based perspective, people use restaurants for entertainment, celebrations, hedonistic enjoyment of food, and for social reasons. Finally, from a cultural perspective, restaurants provide the ability for people to be able to experience foods from different ethnicities and countries and be able to learn about other cultures.

From this research a number of questions arose that could be answered with future research projects. One area that would be interesting and would strengthen the findings of the current study would be to examine how the experience of eating out has changed over time. This could be accomplished through looking at historical documents or by doing qualitative research with individuals that have seen the growth of the restaurant industry over the last fifty years. Understanding how the physical environments, food served, and expectations in restaurants have changed over time would be beneficial in learning about how restaurants have become such a vital part of the food environment.

Another area of future research that would be beneficial to this study is to look specifically at how people use restaurants as a resource for meals they prepare at home. It was found in this study that people use restaurants as a resource, almost like a cookbook and there is likely more to this than simply making a particular food for nourishment. It likely has to do with creating a specific memory having to do with a restaurant

experience or because an individual wants to create a food that they feel links them to their social status, but there is more to this than the few examples suggested herein.

Finally, continuing to work with conceptual models for food choices outside the home would be another area to continue research in. The set of emergent themes that arose from this study fit in quite well with Furst, et al.'s conceptual model for mapping out eating choices and is something that would be useful for future researchers in working with different areas of the decision making process relating to food. This study has provided background information for future research projects relating to the food environment outside the home and the relationship that people have with it in order to better understand the everyday food choices that Americans make.

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Journal # 2 -What are the Roles of Restaurants at Dinnertime in America?

This study explores how people use the food environment, particularly restaurants. Currently, the average American consumes a total of 2.8 meals per week outside the home and this statistic continues to rise.¹ Today, when people choose what they want to have for dinner, the decision-making process always includes the option to eat out at a restaurant. Eating out at restaurants is no longer utilized only for special occasions; it is part of the everyday life of most Americans. Understanding the different ways that individuals utilize restaurants as a resource at dinnertime in America was the main goal of this study. Using the information from this study to create cooking and health-based interventions would represent a new approach to improving eating habits because of the relatively recent cultural shift that has occurred, which has resulted in Americans eating more and more meals outside the home. Throughout the course of this qualitative study, emergent themes were formulated that answer the following question: *Why do you make the choice to eat outside the home?* The roles of the restaurant that stood out most included restaurants as a resource for entertainment, for social connections, for saving time, for trying new foods, and for creating new foods at home. These themes will be exhibited through the use of narrative passages from the interviews with each participant and will be supported by available literature on each topic when available. The main goal in preparing this document was to analyze the current research in order to make recommendations about ways to help people to either decrease their frequency or to improve their choices when they eat outside the home. One way that this could be accomplished is through the integration of nutrition education initiatives into

community cooking interventions. This is something that will be discussed in depth later on.

Background

Obesity has become the number one public health issue in the United States. The cause of obesity cannot be attributed to one factor. There are a number of contributing factors to obesity including but not limited to: lack of physical activity, the food environment, genetics, pharmaceutical drugs, diseases, socioeconomic status, and emotions.² The contributing factor of interest in this study is the food environment outside the home, or more specifically restaurants. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines environment as “the circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded.”³ In the context of the food environment, this includes food that is purchased from grocery stores, farmer’s markets, convenience stores, restaurants of any kind and it also includes eating situations like going to a friend’s or family member’s house for a meal. The food environment also includes the types of foods that are available as well as the types of lifestyles that many people live. Hill, et al.⁴ does a good job of summarizing the overall contribution of the food environment to the obesity epidemic: “Our current environment is characterized by an essentially unlimited supply of convenient, relatively inexpensive, highly palatable, energy-dense foods, coupled with a lifestyle requiring only low levels of physical activity for subsistence. Such an environment promotes high energy intake and low energy expenditure.” These different factors involved in the food environment have been one of the contributing factors in the obesity epidemic. The

growth of the food industry has occurred concurrently with the increase in obesity levels in the U.S.

Food sales outside the home continue to grow every year, as of 2007 food sales outside the home had grown to \$510 billion which represented 48.8% of all food expenditures.^{5,6} This number has grown exponentially over time, from less than \$3 billion and 19.7% in 1939.^{5,6} Even more importantly, the proportion of these sales coming from USDA classified fast food restaurants has increased from 7.1% to 37.4%.⁵ Food sales outside the home are likely to move past 50% of all food sales in the next few years.⁵ It is also estimated that the percentage of calories eaten outside the home has increased from 18% in the mid-1970s to 32% by the early-1990s.⁷ French, et al.⁷ even suggested that meals away from home are more calorie-dense than those prepared at home because eating away from home represented 27% of eating occasions but 34% of energy intake in 1995.

In 1998, on a typical day 46% of adults ate at least one meal out at a restaurant.⁷ Currently, the average American consumes a total of 2.8 meals per week outside the home,¹ 75% of which are from fast food restaurants.⁸ Furthermore, 9% of consumers eat dinner out more than three times per week.⁹ All of these statistics have been steadily rising over time. Based on the tremendous growth of the restaurant industry over time the question that remains is: how have restaurants become such a part of today's food environment?

There has been a general shift in cooking practices over the last 75 years from the home kitchen to the commercial kitchen. Stroebe⁸ has summarized a number of the

reasons that Americans increased their eating outside the home over time, thus increasing the demand for restaurants. The first reason is because women have consistently been entering the workforce over time increasing the demand for commercially prepared meals because they no longer have the time to prepare meals seven days a week.⁸ French, et al.⁷ estimated that in 1900 only 21% of women were in the workforce and by 1998 60% of women were part of the workforce. While more women have been entering the workforce, the amount of time preparing meals in a given week has been decreasing. It is estimated that in 1900, a family would typically spend 44 hours per week doing food related work whereas by 1998 only 10 hours per week were spent on food preparation.⁷ This shows there has been a general shift in cooking practices out of the home.

Another factor in the growth of the food industry is the introduction of technological innovations like vacuum packaging, improved preservatives, deep-freezing, and microwaves over time.⁸ These innovations allow restaurants as well as companies to be able to move food to the consumer safely and quickly and without a great additional cost to the producer.

A third reason is the massive amounts of advertising spending by the food industry.⁸ It is estimated that the restaurant industry spends \$10 billion per year on advertising, and that 18% of all advertisements are related to food.^{8,10} Having the ability to fund massive advertising campaigns ensures the success of many convenience foods and entices the consumer to choose these foods over whole ingredients.

Finally, Stroebe⁸ suggests that the industrialization of the food industry has led to low-cost foods that are very affordable to most consumers. The industrialization of

producing food has resulted in reduced marginal and fixed costs in production as a result of the costs of production being shared by many consumers rather than just a few.¹¹ The ability to disperse marginal and fixed costs has resulted in a decrease in the actual cost of food (adjusted for inflation) by 33% since 1960.¹² Being able to purchase value-added products from both grocery stores and restaurants at a relatively low price has allowed for the continued expansion of the food industry.

Based on the information above, there is a clear link between the growth in the food industry and the shift in cooking from the home to the commercial kitchen. What this study hopes to accomplish is to provide background information for future researchers interested in working with community cooking interventions in order to help people improve their overall eating habits. Interventions in order to improve overall eating habits have not been studied in great detail but may be a means to increase cooking and decrease eating outside the home.¹³ The United States seems to be far behind when it comes to experimenting with community nutrition interventions. The SUPER program in Europe is a collaborative research program that is being conducted in five European cities: Eindhoven (Netherlands), Liverpool (UK), Horsen (Denmark), Rennes (France), and Valencia (Spain) in order to better understand community nutrition class efficacy.¹⁴

There is little ongoing research similar to this in the United States.¹³ Preliminary survey research done by Larson, et al.¹⁵ looking at food preparation habits by young adults showed that “young adults who were more involved in regular food preparation were more likely to meet the dietary objectives of Healthy People 2010.” The main objectives that Larson, et al.¹⁵ and other researchers think should make up the core of

information in community cooking interventions is that they will “teach young adults skills for healthy food preparation. Courses should emphasize basic cooking skills, strategies for making healthful food purchases on a limited income, and ideas for planning quick, balanced meals.” In general, individuals that are less involved in their food preparation tend to consume low-cost convenience foods that are much higher in sugar, fat, and overall calories, which can lead to weight gain over time.¹⁶ This may be a motivating factor for individuals in lower-income populations to eat low-cost convenience foods rather than follow the guidelines of the USDA food pyramid. Overall, a community based cooking intervention with a special focus on eating outside the home would be the logical next step in using the information in this study and would represent a novel approach to maintaining improved eating habits in the long-term.

Now that the future goals for the information from this research have been stated, the specific study will be discussed. At the same time that obesity has become a major public issue in America, the amount that people have been eating out has steadily been rising. Despite this correlation, there is no direct relationship between eating outside the home and obesity. This study will exhibit that people are not considering the health of the food they eat outside the home compared to what they eat at home. This could be an implicating factor in why restaurants are so commonly blamed without justification for contributing to the obesity epidemic. This study attempts to identify how people utilize restaurants as a resource in everyday life in order to better understand how restaurants fit into modern day society. Eating outside the home certainly does come with a variety of

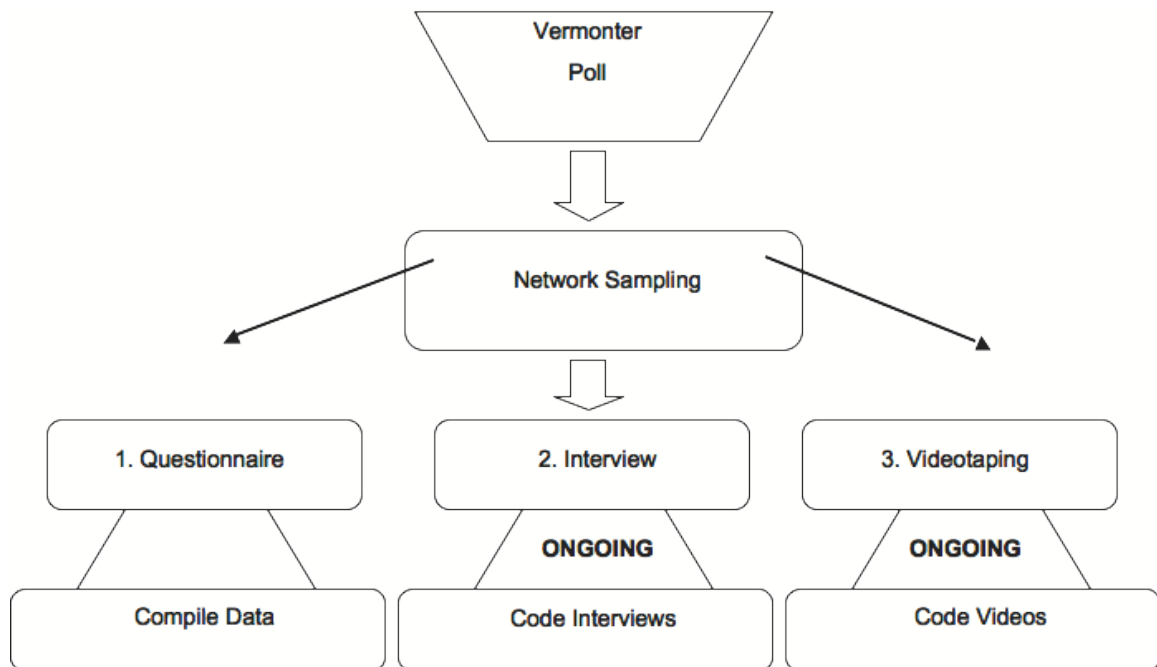
temptations and risks that can lead to weight gain, however, restaurants have come to represent a lot more than danger zones for eating in society during the past century.

Methods

The current study was completed using qualitative research methods in order to gather data that would describe the reasons why people chose to eat out at restaurants for dinner. In general, the main goal in choosing a qualitative approach is because the methodology “aim[s] to provide illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial issues and are most useful for answering humanistic 'why?' and 'how?' questions.”¹⁷ In this case the research question was: why do individuals make the choice to eat outside the home? By using a qualitative approach, information that is gathered can be used in order to build inductive theories as to the roles that restaurants currently fill in American society.

Three different methods of data collection were used. A basic outline of the research process can be seen in figure 2 (below). The primary source of data was semi-structured interviews. Interviews were used because the researcher was hoping to provide in-depth reasoning for eating out at restaurants. Questionnaires as well as videotapes of meal preparations were also used in order to provide triangulation through different methodologies. Triangulation improves the validity of a study by comparing the results from two or more methods of data collection.¹⁸ The three methodologies will be discussed in more depth later on.

Figure 2 : Outline of General Research Process



Participants were selected through a combination of selection strategies. In general, the sampling technique was a combination of both network and snowball sampling. Network sampling was accomplished by finding local contacts in the area of interest in order to have help in recruiting subjects. In each of the three areas, Boston, MA, Burlington, VT, and Middlebury, VT a minimum of three contacts were used. Each contact person was fully disclosed as to the goals of the study as well as the format so that they would be able to better explain the study to the people in their social network. The contact person also acted as the middleman between the researcher and potential participant until permission was received to contact that potential participant.

Once a handful of participants were enrolled in the study, the strategy of sampling transformed to snowball sampling. Snowball sampling or snowballing is when one

participant that is already enrolled in the study can recommend other potential participants that they believe would be useful to the study.¹⁷ This is a particularly useful strategy because if one participant provides information that is strong enough for them to be considered a key informant, it is likely that they would know other people that would be able to provide rich information from their own perspective. This is also beneficial because as the researcher works with different participants, it is likely that new questions and ideas will arise that will necessitate further work with new participants. This iterative process can continue until themes stop emerging and there is sufficient evidence to support each theme.¹⁷ This occurrence is best described as “category saturation.”¹⁹

Seventeen participants were included in this study. Research with all of these participants was completed between May 2007 and September of 2008. All participants were above the age of 18 and were the primary meal preparer in their home. There were few constraints on who could participate in the study besides those mentioned above. One of the main concerns for the researchers was to find participants that would be able to participate in all aspects of the research in order to have a complete set of data for each participant. This was a major concern because each participant generally would need to commit 3-5 hours in order to complete all aspects of the study.

Each participant completed three stages of the research. The first and least time-consuming was the questionnaire. The questionnaire asked questions about participants general cooking and eating habits. An example is: During a typical week, how many nights do you have a meal prepared at a restaurant (either eat-in or take-out)? The questionnaire also gathered demographic information about each participant in order to

have information about each participant to refer back to when considering the in-depth information gathered from the interviews.

The second part of the research that was most valuable to this study was the interview. Before any interviews began, a set of potential interview questions was formulated with a cohort of researchers in order to ensure that no leading questions would be asked. The questions in the interviews were intended to be open-ended and non-directive in order to allow for the participant to answer in a non researcher-biased situation. More information on the interview process can be seen in footnote¹. The categories and examples of the initial questions can be seen in table 1.

Table 10 : Initial categories and questions of interest in semi-structured interviews

Category	Question Formulated for Interview
View on the health of restaurant foods.	How do you view the health of a meal made at home versus a meal purchased outside the home?
Reasons for eating outside the home.	Why do you choose to eat out at restaurants?
Values when eating outside the home.	What is important to you when you go out to eat at a restaurant?
Choice in restaurant type.	If you decide not to cook dinner at home, what type of food establishments do you tend to go to?

From these initial categories and questions more areas emerged from initial interviews that interested the researcher and required further questioning. The new

¹ The interviews were semi-structured and approximately 30-minutes in length and focused on cooking and eating outside the home. The nature of the interview process being semi-structured allowed for the researcher to go in different directions with each participant based on the responses to certain questions. This allowed for each participant to provide in-depth information on their personal experiences while still answering the questions that the researcher had. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed into Microsoft Word.

questions arose as a result of the research process being iterative and continuous and allowing for ongoing analysis. These categories and the emergent questions for the researcher are seen in table 2.

Table 11 : Secondary categories and emergent questions semi-structured interviews

Category	Emergent Question
Social reasons for eating out.	Who do participants eat out with? Family? Friends? Co-workers?
Utilizing restaurants for ideas.	Did participants try to recreate foods from restaurants at home? What were barriers to doing this?
Utilizing restaurants as a time-saving resource.	Did participants use restaurants as a time-saving resource? If so, how?

The final method, videotaping, was completed primarily as part of a larger study focusing on cooking, however, it did provide additional information for the researcher. Each participant was videotaped on two separate occasions cooking a typical dinner meal. During each videotape there was little structured dialogue, but conversations during the videotaping were common in order to create rapport and a relaxed environment for the participant. These conversations were often related to issues discussed in the interview process and provided another source of data.

Analysis of the research was an ongoing process. The analysis method most closely follows the constant comparison method of grounded theory analysis where “investigators systematically categorize the data and limit theorizing until patterns in the data emerge from the categorizing operation.”¹⁹ Throughout the course of the interviewing process the researcher was analyzing already completed interviews in order

to continue to answer emerging questions in the data collection. For more information on the analysis, see footnote².

Participants

Table 3 provides some background information about the participants in this study. The information in this table was collected from either the questionnaire or from interviews and general observation. Of the 17 participants, four were in their 20s, four were in their 30s, four were in their 40s, three in their 50s, one in their 60s, and one in their 70s. The overall range in age was from 25 to 72. The age range is beneficial in providing the perspective of many different populations, but does not allow for generalization to a specific age group. There were four males compared with thirteen females. This was somewhat expected as the majority of primary meal preparers in America are women.

The majority of participants were Caucasians born in America but there were two immigrants, one from Trinidad and one from Russia. This provided some insight into the experiences of individuals transitioning to the American food environment; however, the experiences of two individuals do not provide enough information to make inferences about the transition of immigrants to the American food environment.

² Once all data collection was complete, the researcher could then read all interviews as a complete set and be able to review all videos and questionnaires for further information. From this process a list of emergent themes were formulated. Once these themes were formulated then the researcher could go back and sort passages of the interview and information from the videos and questionnaires into the appropriate theme. Once the data is categorized by theme, it is ready to be used for the development of theory.

Seven participants were interviewed in Boston, seven in Burlington, and three in Middlebury. This allowed for a mix of participants to be interviewed from urban, suburban, and rural locations in order to see if there are any differences in eating habits based on location and availability of foods.

Nine participants were married, six were single, and two were divorced. Finally, eight participants did not have children, six participants had children living in their home, and three participants had children no longer living at home. Having variety in the types of households interviewed was beneficial in seeing how the dynamics of relationships or lack thereof, as well presence or absence of children can impact the choices made about food choices.

Overall, the participant pool was quite diverse. Every individual had a different lifestyle and living situation, which provides great variance in the experiences that each participant would provide. The information in this research is not designed to be generalizable to greater populations, but having a diverse group of participants does add to the validity of commonly occurring themes in the research.

Table 12 : Demographics of participants in study

Number	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Location	Marital Status	Children
1	30s	F	Caucasian	Middlebury	Married	4 kids at home
2	50s	F	Caucasian	Middlebury	Married	2 kids at home
3	70s	M	Caucasian	Middlebury	Married	No kids at home
4	30s	F	Caucasian	Boston	Single	No kids
5	50s	F	African-American	Boston	Married	2 kids at home
6	40s	F	Caucasian	Boston	Single	No kids
7	30s	F	Trinidadian	Boston	Married	No kids
8	40s	F	Caucasian	Boston	Divorced	1 kid at home
9	20s	F	Caucasian	Boston	Single	No kids
10	40s	M	Caucasian	Boston	Married	2 kids at home
11	20s	F	Caucasian	Burlington	Single	No kids
12	30s	F	Russian	Burlington	Divorced	No kids
13	20s	F	Caucasian	Burlington	Single	No kids
14	60s	F	Caucasian	Burlington	Married	No kids at home
15	50s	M	Caucasian	Burlington	Married	No kids at home
16	40s	F	Caucasian	Burlington	Married	2 kids at home
17	20s	M	Caucasian	Burlington	Single	No kids

Results & Discussion

The following five themes as to the roles of restaurants will be discussed individually: resource for entertainment, for social connections, for saving time, for trying new foods, and for creating new foods at home. These themes will exhibit the importance that restaurants have in American society as a resource for individuals. Each of the themes will be explained and supported using examples from interviews and current literature. This will show how important restaurants are to everyday life in

America. Once this is complete the discussion will shift to looking at restaurant eating from a public health perspective.

Resource for Entertainment

From the beginning of this research project it was clear that going out for meals is about more than just nourishment. Participants mentioned going out for a meal in order to get out of the house in the winter months or to simply do something fun.

“Its an activity. Its like, ah, can we get take-out? Its like wow can we go to the zoo? It’s got this exciting to me like, and it also always happens on a day when like, I don’t want to cook everyday.” [Respondent 11]

For this person, eating out has similar connections to doing things that are entirely for pleasure. She also mentions that going out is a break from cooking on a daily basis. The connection for her includes the idea that going out to eat is fun, but also that it takes the place of something that can be considered a burden. Another example further describes eating out as a form of entertainment.

“It’s fun, and um, like last weekend we went to Three Tomatoes, we sat on Church Street, we felt like we were on vacation, kids were great, everybody had a good time.”
[Respondent 16]

This person associates going out for a meal as almost being on vacation. She shows that going out to this particular restaurant evokes emotions that are purely for pleasure and an escape from any worries. Although she does not specifically mention her relationship to cooking in this passage, this woman also felt that eating outside the home was a break from the burden of cooking a meal every night.

The idea of eating outside the home as being a form of entertainment is something that has been looked at by a few researchers. According to Warde et al.²⁰ “eating out seems to be expanding as a form of entertainment and a means to display taste, status, and distinction.” Warde et al.²⁰ recognizes that people do eat for nourishment as well as to be satisfied but that eating out “may also be a source of great enjoyment.” When asking respondents if they wished to eat out more often, 59% said that they would like to and the reasons why or why not included income, leisure activities, domestic constraints, and anticipation of pleasure.²⁰ In this case two of the top four reasons for eating out were directly related to the experience of eating out as a leisure activity or because it can be a pleasurable experience.

In addition, Kim et al.²¹ did research on understanding local food consumption on trips and holidays, and they found that eating out was a means to escape from people’s normal routine and be away from their usual environments. In addition, Park, et al.²² found that hedonic attributes of eating outside the home were more important to Korean consumers than the convenience of eating outside the home. Finally, Costa, et al.²³ found that eating at a restaurant is a means of achieving pleasure through “the enjoyment of food and location.” All this research supports the idea that one role of restaurants is as a place for entertainment.

Resource for Social Connections

Participants also consistently used restaurants as a resource for social connections. Restaurants provide a physical space or medium for having social interaction. Many

people mentioned that they most commonly went out for meals in order to meet friends and family as an event in itself or to celebrate something important happening in their lives.

“I’d say it’s probably 75% of the time involved with a social event so it’s enjoying the meal with friends out.” [Respondent 9]

For this woman, she acknowledges that most of the meals she chooses to eat outside the home are not primarily for nourishment but are to make or continue connections with other people. This participant even went as far as to say that if she prepares a meal and then realizes that there is a social opportunity that involves a meal, she will not eat her home cooked meal and go out instead. Looking at this from another side, it seems that she does not feel that having a social experience involving food at her home is an option. She mentioned the size of her living space as a reason for not having more people over for meals, but the general availability of restaurants in a city (Boston) is probably another factor influencing her social activities. Restaurants also provide an environment that is welcoming for all parties involved in a social event. One participant describes this phenomenon in the following way:

“There is also the social aspect where everybody wants to go where they feel comfortable.” [Respondent 12]

This suggests that not only is there a comforting and welcoming feeling about a restaurant environment, but also that there may be something intimidating about eating a meal at a friends’ or families’ house. Few participants mentioned having dinner parties at their homes on a regular basis and this may be due to the welcoming environment that a

restaurant conveys to a consumer. This idea is further supported by participants talking about eating at a restaurant rather than at home when celebrating something.

“My daughter is doing an Ameri-corps job out in Oregon. She came back last, a week ago tomorrow, is that right? Yeah, probably. When she came back into town we went to Tiny Thai for dinner. She likes Tiny Thai, it was sort of a cool thing that she is back in town, sort of celebratory kind of thing.” [Respondent 15]

Eating out for social reasons is something that does come up often in the literature. Warde et al.²⁰ supports the idea that restaurants create a physical environment that requires no responsibility from the consumer to create or uphold. Having no responsibility for the environment of a social connection results in a constructed environment for engagement between people.²⁰ As a result, the restaurant environment allows for the focus to be on social interactions between people without interruption.

Families also use eating out at restaurant as a medium for social interaction. Costa, et al.²³ found that going out for meals improved family harmony through “an increased level of socialisation through dinner time.” This suggests that meals at home may be considered to be less social events within the construct of the family when compared to eating outside the home. Overall, the use of restaurants as a physical space for social interaction is seen in this study as well as in the research world.

Resource for Saving Time

Eating foods from outside the home were also cited as a resource for saving time. Often times purchasing prepared foods or getting take-out were the main ways that participants used restaurants to save time. Of the participants that discussed using meals

outside the home as a resource for saving time, the majority found that they would do this when their work schedule interfered with meal times or when unexpected events arose.

“There’s probably a good 25% of the time when I’m grabbing something because I have to get back to work, or I have something else I have to get done that night or like I said before, I’m just so hungry I can’t wait.” [Respondent 9]

This passage came from the same person who said that 75% of her meals were eaten out because of social connections. What this means is that the rest of the time she is eating out because she feels she does not have the time to prepare a dinner meal or a meal-time occurs when she needs to be working. Another participant discusses that when his schedule changes suddenly or something comes up that he and his wife make the choice to eat out, even if he had a home cooked meal planned.

“Sometimes I’ll plan a dinner, I’ll get stuck at work, I get home late, or we’ll get something else going on and we will meet someplace like at Tiny Thai.” [Respondent 15]

This person goes on to discuss that the accessibility and convenience of restaurants allow him flexibility in his meal choices with his hectic and unpredictable work schedule.

Restaurants are acknowledged as a time saving device. In addition, restaurants are looked at as a resource for selling time. Consumers are often referred to as “time-buying consumers” when they make the choice to eat outside the home instead of cook when time is a main factor.²⁴ This allows people to purchase time that they can use to do other activities or use a meal as a leisure activity itself. For the most part, the idea of getting food from a restaurant and bringing it home best represents the ability to save or buy time, however eating in a restaurant does have its own time related implications. According to Warde, et al.²⁰ eating in restaurants may not actually save time but because

it is such an escape from the reality of a busy schedule it allows for time that would be spent completing a task (preparing a meal) to instead be used for a leisure activity. It was found in both this study and in Warde, et al.'s²⁵ work, that getting take-out or prepared meals is the better way to actually save time. Most participants in this study talked about getting take-out at the end of a busy work-week or when tired.

“I’m lucky because I do have, my husband and my kids, if I come home and I don’t feel like cooking, they’re happy with a pizza.” [Respondent 5]

Regardless of whether an individual is eating meals prepared outside the home at restaurants or bringing them home they are either saving time, buying time, or using their time in a leisurely manner.

Resource for Trying New Foods

The idea that people go out for meals in order to try something new and different is something that was commonly discussed by participants. One participant expresses her interest in eating outside the home because:

“there’s something about going out and uh, you know, trying something different.” [Respondent 14]

In this case, she is speaking about the general difference in the cuisine that she gets out at a restaurant compared to what she prepares at home. This woman later explained that she ordered different foods at restaurants despite her knowledge that they likely did not fit into her definition of healthy eating practices. Other participants appreciated the opportunity to eat out because:

“I’m kind just kind of like in a pretty busy work week, I fall probably like most people to standard probably five or seven meals.” [Respondent 13]

This participant as well as many others expressed the enjoyment of eating out because it broke the monotony of the typical meals that they prepared at home. When an individual only feels comfortable preparing a certain set of meals on a daily basis, it is likely they will eventually become tired of these meals and want to eat outside the home. Another participant likely used restaurants as a resource for new and different foods because:

“I don’t want to have to think about cooking so I just make the same thing every night without using a cookbook for a month or two until my family screams.” [Respondent 2]

Participants expressed the excitement in trying something new as well as the lack of capability they often felt when thinking about making these foods at home. A number of participants mentioned ethnic foods from a cuisine different than their own cultural background as something different and exciting that they typically get from restaurants.

“I don’t try at all to make Thai food, I order Thai food almost every Friday, quite a bit. I love chicken satay but you will not see me trying to recreate that.” [Respondent 7]

Three participants mentioned going out for Thai food as part of their repertoire of meals they would eat outside of the home and two of them specifically mentioned that they did not feel comfortable preparing Thai food. Other examples that people mentioned eating outside the home included Chinese as well as Indian foods because “it’s something that I’m not that familiar with cooking.” [Respondent 2]

Trying new and different foods has been seen as an emergent theme in a variety of other studies. Kim et al.²¹ theorized that people often try foreign foods because they allow people that generally enjoy excitement “to have exciting experiences” that are different from their daily lives. Costa, et al.²³ further supports this by saying that there is

general “excitement/adventure by creating the opportunity to come in contact with different eating cultures.” Overall the idea of getting new and different foods fit into the experiential aspect of eating outside the home in terms of entertainment, social reasons as well to get new and different foods. A quote from Warde, et al.²⁰ sums up how different and exciting foods as well as some of the other themes in this study fit together: “‘Getting a change’ included eating different foods, at different times (on holidays and at weekends), in different surroundings (from home or known and tested commercial venues), and in different company (whether acquaintances or strangers).”

Resource for Creating New Foods at Home

Despite the commonality that many people ate certain ethnic foods out at restaurants exclusively, there were a number of participants that used restaurants in order to find new foods to add to their personal repertoire of meals at home. Out of seven interviews that were specifically focused on restaurant eating, three participants mentioned taking ideas from restaurants and using them to prepare meals at home. This is one theme during this research that arose that is not discussed in the literature. Participants often expressed their desire to recreate foods that they enjoyed at a restaurant.

If I went out to dinner last week and there was a salad I liked and I want to make that salad, I will make that salad and that may take a little longer.” [Respondent 4]

This woman expresses her desire to create a meal that she had outside the home. Despite the ability she claims to possess in order to recreate a very similar version of the

food at home she, along with all the participants that mentioned recreating foods, have barriers to accomplishing that task. For her, the additional time it would take to prepare the meal was a barrier. Another participant discusses recreating his favorite meal, Buddha Beef, from a Chinese restaurant and when talking about the process of creating this meal he says that:

“I have never really fried much food at home. To have all that oil, its just too messy, just don’t want to bother with it, but that’s how you make it.” [Respondent 15]

For this person, the technique required to prepare a meal that he had in a restaurant is a major barrier and would be for a lot of people because of the difference in the innovations in commercial cooking equipment versus home cooking equipment. In addition, this gentleman’s desire to recreate Buddha Beef comes with less certainty compared to his normal cooking because he is constantly comparing the outcome of this meal to the one he gets from the restaurant. He says that he often wonders about this meal, “how close is it to down there.” [Respondent 15] Despite this concern, he does often enjoy the freedom to adjust the recipe to his own preferences because “they have more Buddha beef and I have more vegetables.” [Respondent 15]

Trying to recreate a meal at home is not necessarily done in order to create an exact replica in taste and flavor of the food eaten at the restaurant. There are extraneous factors when eating at a restaurant that cannot be recreated at home. Recreating a meal is likely more about getting an idea from a restaurant and then creating a variation of that meal at home. This is similar to opening a cookbook, choosing a recipe, and then altering that recipe to fulfill one’s personal preference. It is also possible that it is simply just about the challenge of being able to trying to create that same meal:

“Sometimes I’ll have something in a restaurant and I’ll think I have to figure out how to do this.” [Respondent 6]

Either way, this area of the research is particularly fascinating in that there is little discussion on the use of restaurants as a resource for new food in home kitchens. Perhaps this will continue to be a trend in the future.

Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to better understand the current roles and functions of restaurants. This information was revealed through qualitative research methods including interviews, videotapes, and questionnaires focusing on cooking and eating outside the home. This study was able to show the reasons why people make the choice to eat outside the home as well as the ways that people utilize restaurants today. The ways that the participants utilized restaurants was in the following ways: as a resource for entertainment, for social connections, for saving time, for trying new foods, and for creating new foods at home. All of these themes were formulated from the transcriptions of the interviews and were triangulated through multiple research methods. What this research has shown is that restaurants are so well engrained into daily life, habits, and choices that it is not realistic to try to tell individuals to eat out altogether. Instead, the relationship that people have with restaurants needs to be shifted over time so that people know how to make better dietary choices when eating outside the home.

The themes discussed in this study were further supported by the literature that is currently available, with the exception of one theme. The one theme that had no support

in the literature was the idea that people utilize restaurants as a means of discovering new foods to prepare at home, almost like a cookbook. What this shows is that the relationship that American's have with restaurants is constantly changing based on their needs in everyday life. Based on this assumption, it is possible that as people find more and more ways to utilize restaurants they will continue to eat out more and cook less often. This could have some detrimental effects on the overall health of Americans as the reliance on others to prepare meals continues to grow and the control that people have over the ingredients they are eating continues to decrease. Even though eating out is an important part of American culture, it is possible that it is reaching excessive levels in many people's lives. This is because whenever people have the feeling that they do not have enough time, energy, or they don't have the skills to prepare what they want they decide to go out for a meal instead. As was stated earlier, individuals that cook their meals more often meet the dietary guidelines of Healthy People 2010.¹⁵ As a result, even though it would be unrealistic to assume that restaurant eating will disappear, it is important to emphasize the necessity to continue to cook for oneself to maintain some control over foods consumed on a daily basis. When people eat outside the home they are not concerned with the health of the food that they are eating. This tendency needs to be addressed. The following section discusses one way that this can be accomplished.

The outcome of this study was a set of emergent themes outlining the functions and roles of restaurants. The objective in gathering this information was to be able to use the research to build a future community food intervention in order to help individuals improve their eating habits both inside and outside the home. Currently, community food

interventions are just gaining support and the need for them is becoming recognized. As was stated earlier, when discussing the importance of community food interventions, Larson et al.¹⁵ concluded that “Our findings support the value of university and community-based courses that teach young adults skills for healthy food preparation. Courses should emphasize basic cooking skills, strategies for making healthful food purchases on a limited income, and ideas for planning quick, balanced meals.” Being able to integrate information on eating out would be useful to participants in a community food intervention especially since programs are still largely undeveloped in the United States. This would also be useful because the intervention would be inclusive of all the meals people are eating. As was stated earlier, almost half of food purchases are outside the home, so if an intervention was solely focused on cooking, it would really only be helping people with half of their food experiences. This would not solve problems related to obesity especially since many people in this study already had rules and requirements for their meals at home. The way that this intervention could be organized will be discussed next.

The following are some potential areas this intervention could be focused on. Overall, the goal of providing community food interventions with a focus on eating out would be to help people navigate the so-called obesogenic environment. The first way would be to integrate nutrition education programs relating to eating outside the home into a community food intervention through actual restaurant experiences as a group. By taking a group out for a meal, they would be able to discuss all the factors that facilitate their food choices and eating habits. Also, the leader would be able to discuss the health

of particular meals in order to provide a basis for how to make healthier selections when eating out. As was stated in the results, many people have specific sets of rules pertaining to the health of their meals at home, but when they go out to eat they tend to not have any rules and are essentially on a vacation from their normal habits. Having participants create a set of rules for themselves when eating out would be beneficial in creating some boundaries as to the food that is consumed outside the home.

Also, as this study showed, social implications are an important aspect in making the choice to eat out and likely factor into food choices when actually eating out. These forces could be explained to the participants so that they will consider that being with others can influence food choices as well as the amount of food consumed.

Another part of this nutrition education process would be to give individuals materials that they could use when going out to eat in order to help them with food choices. This would allow participants that feel a loss of control over what they are eating to be able to have more knowledge about the food that they are eating. More specifically, there was a participant in this research that talked about the health of food when eating out as “ignorance is bliss” because she could then eat whatever she wanted. Having some more knowledge of the food that she is eating would prevent getting into the habit of eating whatever someone wants because they do not know what is in it. This strategy would likely be successful, as many people do not explicitly consider these factors when eating out at a restaurant. Also, having the nutrition education process actually occur in the restaurant would create a standard for how to eat outside the home with more of an

ability to make healthy choices because they would have already experienced the process once.

The other aspect of the nutrition education process in order to eat out less or to improve food choices would be to provide education on creating positive experiences and traditions at home through the teaching of cooking skills. The classes would most importantly provide some basic cooking skills in order to build upon the repertoire of meals an individual can prepare on a daily basis. This would improve the level of cooking confidence an individual has in order to not only cook more often, but to try to cook more often from scratch. The intervention could also go one step further and help to teach people how to cook for special occasions as well as gatherings. This would motivate these individuals to not always look to restaurants as the answer when an important occasion arose in their life. As was stated in the results, the majority of participants mentioned that they went out to eat for special occasions and rarely would invite people over for celebrations. This intervention could be studied through a variety of methodologies including observation, interviews, and questionnaires in order to see if providing cooking skills and education in order to navigate the food environment was beneficial. Also, assessing participants at baseline and over a long period of time would be important to determining if the intervention had a long-time impact on cooking and eating habits. Although a great deal of preparation and further research would be needed in order to actually implement a community food intervention like the one discussed, it would likely be the best course of action based on this findings from this research.

Based on the data from this research, eating outside the home continues to be an important part of every day life. The relationship that Americans have with restaurants seems to be flawed, as people go out to eat with no health restraints or concerns for what they are eating. People use restaurants because they do not feel like they have the time to cook and are looking for an escape from their typical routine. Unfortunately it seems as if home cooking is not looked upon as a place to escape from routine and the only way people feel free from worry or concern at dinnertime is by eating out. This is an attitude that will need to shift in order for people to improve their overall eating habits.

Despite the depth of knowledge found by the researcher, it is clear that there were a few limitations to this study. The main limitation to this study is that the author of this article did not conduct every interview used in the analysis. The author only worked with seven of the seventeen participants as part of his master's research. Two other members of this research cohort studied the other ten participants. This is a limitation in that each researcher had their own specific goals in working with participants, which may not have been as concerned with restaurant eating. Despite this limitation, it is also a benefit because multiple researchers had the opportunity to work with the entire pool of data, ensuring that there was consensus over results.

Another limitation was the geographical choices for the study. It was originally the researchers intent to have a rural, a suburban, and urban location for research to ensure that different types of living conditions were looked at. During the research, however, it was discovered that population restraints that define a rural community did not include Middlebury, Vermont. Another rural location, however, has been selected to

complete the study and the research from this area will be compared with all current results to ensure accuracy. In the future, it would be beneficial to do quantitative surveying in order to provide further support for the results of this study. Finally, other geographical areas should be researched in order to be able to draw some conclusions about restaurant eating for different parts of America.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Conceptual Model for Food Choice

FOOD CHOICE

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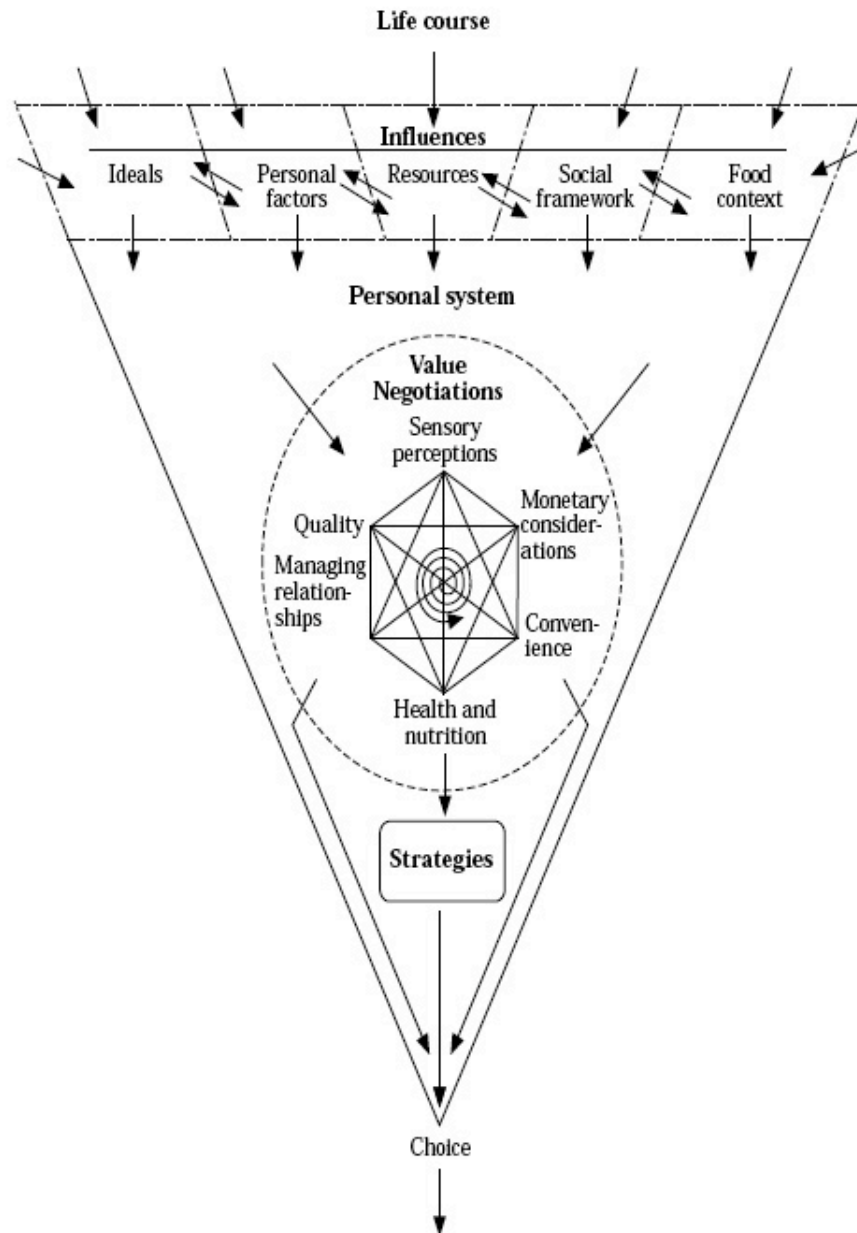


FIGURE 1. A conceptual model of the components in the food choice process.

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Appendix B – Nutrition and Healthy Foods Section, Vermonter Poll 2008

Frequency Report – March 31, 2008

Introduction

The Vermonter Poll is an annual public opinion survey of Vermont residents who are 18 years of age and older, conducted by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont, to gauge Vermonter's opinions on current issues of interest to non-profit agencies, government officials, and researchers. On the 2008 Vermonter Poll, six questions were asked of residents to understand their level of concern for eating healthy foods, what is important to them in preparing a healthy meal, and how their time influences their cooking and dining out practices (See Appendix A for a complete list of questions).

Respondent demographics

Slightly more than half of respondents surveyed are female (52%, 320) and 48% (294) are male. The average age of respondents was 56 years old (Std. = 15.3) with a median age of 57 years. The youngest age was 20 years, and the oldest was 95. Education data was collapsed into two categories, with 24% (149) having attained a high school diploma or GED certificate and 76% (465) completed some college education or a higher degree. Examining household income by median income in Vermont (\$50,000), 39% (213) of respondents earn less than the median income in Vermont and 61% (335) earn at or above the median income. Respondents had a median household size of two, with a range of one to nine members in one's household. An analysis of family composition showed that 72% (439) of households had no children, while 28% (17) had children in their household. The number of children in households ranged from 1 to 5 with a median and mode of two children. The majority of Vermonters surveyed reported that they are of a Caucasian decent (97%, 582).

Findings

Table 1 shows that three quarters of Vermonter Poll respondents reported that the "type of ingredients used" is the most important factor to them when preparing a healthy meal in their home.

Table 1. Most important factor when preparing a healthy meal at home

	Frequency	Percent
Type of ingredients used	445	74.9
Total number of calories	54	9.1
Cooking techniques used	47	7.9
Other	31	5.2
Amount of food served	17	2.9
Total	594	100.0

Other options include:

- All of the above or combination (8)
- Local/organic/quality ingredients (6)
- Amount of time to cook/prepare (3)
- Appearance/desire for food (2)
- Prepared foods based on dietary needs such as having diabetes or high cholesterol (2)
- Ease of preparation
- Like a good meal every night
- Nutrition
- Price
- Taste
- Theme / culture
- Whatever is available

Table 2 shows that the majority of Vermonters surveyed, 94%, commented that they are concerned with eating healthy foods.

Table 2. If respondent is concerned with eating healthy foods

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	575	93.6
No	39	6.4
Total	614	100.0

Table 3 reports that for almost two thirds of Vermont respondents, the ability to prepare a healthy meal is not impacted by the amount of time they have to cook.

Table 3. If ability to prepare a healthy meal is impacted by the amount of time respondents have to cook

	Frequency	Percent
No	391	63.8
Yes	222	36.2
Total	613	100.0

Table 4 shows that 51% of respondents reported not eating their dinner meal out at a restaurant, while 49% (299) reported going out between one and six times per week for dinner at a restaurant. Of those who eat out at least once a week at a restaurant, the average is 1.3 times a week, and the median and mode are one time a week.

Table 4. Number of times respondent has dinner at a restaurant on a weekly basis

	Frequency	Percent
0	312	51.1
1	23	38.5
2	44	7.2
3	10	1.6
4	4	.7
5	3	.5
6	3	.5
Total	611	100.0

Table 5 shows that two thirds of respondents indicated that meals served as restaurants are less healthy than meals they prepare at home. On the contrary, 31% noted that meals from restaurants are equally as healthy as a meal made at home.

Table 5. Perceived healthiness of meals at restaurant compared to meals at home

	Frequency	Percent
Less healthy than a meal at home	191	65.6
Equally healthy as a meal at home	91	31.3
More healthy than a meal at home	9	3.1
Total	291	100.0

Table 6 shows that 70% of Vermonters surveyed do not feel that the amount of time they have to cook influences how often they go to a restaurant.

Table 6. If amount of time to cook influences how often respondent eats out at a restaurant

	Frequency	Percent
No	211	70.1
Yes	90	29.9
Total	301	100.0

Methodology

The data used in this report was collected by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont as part of the annual Vermonter Poll. The survey was conducted between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. beginning on February 26, 2008 and ending on March 7, 2008. The telephone polling was conducted from the University of Vermont using computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI). The sample for the poll was drawn using a simple random sample of telephone exchanges in the state of Vermont as the sampling frame. Only Vermont residents over the age of eighteen were interviewed. The poll included questions on a variety of issues related to public policy in the state of Vermont. There were 617 respondents to the 2007 Vermonter Poll (Version II). The results based on a group of this size have a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent at a confidence interval of 95 percent. This report was compiled by Michele Cranwell Schmidt at the Center for Rural Studies.

Questions Asked During Survey

Q: q9 *****

Now I have several questions about your meal choices.

Of the following choices, which is most important to you when preparing a healthy meal in your home?

- 1.The type of ingredients used
- 2.The amount of food served
- 3.The total number of calories
- 4.The cooking techniques used
- 5.Another option (please specify)
- 6.I don't prepare meals [DO NOT READ]
- 7.Don't Know [DO NOT READ]
- 8.Refused [DO NOT READ]

Q: q10 *****

Are you concerned with eating healthy foods?

- 1.Yes
- 2.No
- 3.Don't know [DO NOT READ]
- 4.Refused [DO NOT READ]

Q: q11 *****

Is your ability to prepare a healthy meal impacted by the amount of time you have to cook?

- 1.Yes
- 2.No
- 3.Don't know [DO NOT READ]
- 4.Refused [DO NOT READ]

Q: q12 *****

In a typical week, how many times do you have DINNER at a restaurant?

Number of times [INTERVIEWER: Don't know = 8 Refused = 9]

if (q12=0) skip q15

Q: q13 *****

Typically, do you think that a meal at a restaurant is:

1. Less healthy than a meal at home
2. Equally healthy as a meal at home
3. More healthy than a meal at home
4. I do not purchase meals at restaurants [DO NOT READ]
5. Don't know [DO NOT READ]
6. Refused [DO NOT READ]

Q: q14 *****

Does the amount of time you have to cook influence how often you go to restaurants?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Know [DO NOT READ]
4. Refused [DO NOT READ]

Appendix C – Letter of Invitation to Study

Date

Dear Participant:

My name is Anthony Epter, and I am a graduate student at the University of Vermont working on my Master's Degree in Nutrition. I am writing you to invite you to participate in a research study seeking to better understand how people cook today. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are responsible for the majority of the meal preparation that takes place in your household. This study seeks to examine the connections between our food environment and our health. I have a specific interest in looking at the factors that influence people to eat more and more dinner meals away from home.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following

- Complete a short survey which will be mailed to you
- Participate in one 30-minute audio taped interview at your home
- Cook *two* family meals at home. I will videotape both meal preparations.

The audio portion of the study can occur on the same day as one of the videotaped portions, or can be scheduled at a different time, depending on your preference. The survey and interview will primarily involve questions about how you learned to cook, how you assess your level of cooking skill, what makes cooking a family meal enjoyable or difficult, and your decision-making process when it is time to decide what to have for dinner.

As compensation, you will receive a \$100 gift certificate to one of a number of restaurants and markets in the Burlington area after completion of the survey, interview, and both meal preparations. We may contact you in the future but on-going participation in this research project is entirely optional.

I hope you are interested in participating in this research study. I feel that having a conversation about food and cooking with you will be very rewarding and beneficial to my project. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions (aepter@uvm.edu or 203-733-6427) or, if you would like to participate, please let me know and we can set up our first time to meet.

Sincerely,

Anthony Epter

Appendix D – Participant Cooking Survey

University of Vermont, Dr. Amy B. Trubek
A Study of Cooking Skill and Cooking Knowledge

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. Your participation is completely voluntary. Your time and effort is greatly appreciated. The survey should take less than twenty minutes to complete.

Section I: Cooking

1. *Fill in the blank:* My favorite recipe to prepare is:

2. *Fill in the blank:* What is your favorite restaurant in the Burlington area?

3. During the past week, how many **dinner** meals did YOU prepare at home?

- ☐ 0 – 1 dinner meals
- ☐ 2 – 4 dinner meals
- ☐ 5 – 7 dinner meals
- ☐ Don't know

4. Which of the following terms best describes YOUR cooking ability? (*check only one*)

- ☐ Advanced skill
- ☐ Intermediate skill
- ☐ Basic skill
- ☐ Little or no skill
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Decline to state

5. Read each of the following statements and check all that apply.

I've learned cooking skills from:

- ☐ Cookbooks
- ☐ Cooking classes
- ☐ My family members
- ☐ My friends
- ☐ The Internet
- ☐ Repetition and personal experience
- ☐ Television

Other: _____

6. When purchasing food for a meal, which of the following factors is the **most important**: *(check only one)*

- ☐ Convenience
- ☐ Cost
- ☐ Flavor
- ☐ Health
- ☐ Decline to state

Other _____

7. When deciding on what meal to prepare, which of the following factors is the **most important**:

(check only one)

- ☐ Ease of preparation
- ☐ Family tradition
- ☐ Food availability

- ☐ Time
- ☐ Total calories
- ☐ Using minimally processed foods
- ☐ None of the Above
- ☐ Decline to state

Other _____

8. What do you think makes a meal a “healthy meal”?

9. During a typical week, how many nights per week do you have dinner purchased from a restaurant (either eat-in or take-out)?

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1 - 2
- ☐ 3 - 4
- ☐ 5 - 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ Decline to State

*Note: If you answered 0, please estimate the number of times that you may have dinner purchased from a restaurant in a typical month: _____

10. When you go out to dinner, what type of restaurant do you **most frequently** go to?

- ☐ Full Service- Privately Owned (i.e. Smokejacks, Sweetwaters)
- ☐ Full Service- Chain (i.e. Chili’s, Outback)

- ☐ Limited Service- Privately Owned (i.e. Stone Soup, New World Tortilla)
- ☐ Limited Service- Chain (i.e. McDonalds, Burger King, Moe's)

11. When you go out to dinner, what are the main contributing factors as to why you choose to eat a meal prepared outside the home? (*Check all that apply*)

- ☐ There are more food options at a restaurant.
- ☐ It is more convenient than cooking.
- ☐ Going out to eat is usually a social event.
- ☐ I cannot prepare foods at home with the same taste and flavor.
- ☐ I do not know how to prepare certain foods.
- ☐ Other _____

Section II: Demographics

12. What ethnic origin do you consider yourself to be:
(*You may check more than one box.*)

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ African American
- ☐ Asian Indian
- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Filipino
- ☐ Japanese

- ☐ Korean
- ☐ Middle Eastern
- ☐ Native Hawaiian
- ☐ Other Pacific Islander

-
- ☐ Samoan
 - ☐ Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
 - ☐ Vietnamese
 - ☐ Decline to state

Other _____

13. Please indicate your date of birth (mm/dd/yyyy): _____/_____/_____

14. Please indicate your gender:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Decline to state

15. Based on your household's TOTAL income in 2006, please indicate which category is most appropriate:

- ☐ below \$15,000
- ☐ \$15,000 - \$24,999
- ☐ \$25,000 - \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 - \$74,999
- ☐ \$75,000 and above
- ☐ Decline to state

Other _____

16. Approximately, how much do you weigh in pounds?

_____ pounds ☐ Decline to state

17. Approximately, how tall are you?

_____ feet _____ inches ☐ Decline to state

Section III: Comments or Questions

14. Please feel free to use this section of the survey to make any comments or questions you have regarding this survey or to provide us with any additional information.

[illegible]

<hr/>

Cooking Skill and Cooking Knowledge

Section IV: Respondent Information

Respondent name: _____
Respondent occupation: _____
Date survey completed: _____
Respondent phone number/email address: _____

Section V: Gift Certificate

Please indicate your top three choices for restaurants/markets you would like to receive a \$100 gift certificate to, with 1 being your first choice, 2 being your second choice and 3 being your third choice.

____ American Flatbread - Burlington, Vermont

SSN: ____ - ____ - ____

____ City Market – Burlington, Vermont

Mailing Address:

____ Hannaford Supermarkets

____ Healthy Living – South Burlington, Vermont

____ Smokejacks – Burlington, Vermont

____ A Single Pebble – Burlington, Vermont

If you choose to receive a gift certificate, you must provide your social security number and mailing address.

If you are not comfortable with providing your social security number, you may elect to receive a gift box full of Vermont food products.

_____ Vermont Gift Box

Once the survey is received by the researchers, this page will be separated from the rest of the survey.

Thank you very much for completing this survey. Please return the survey at the time of either your interview or one of your videotaping sessions. For any further information please contact:

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E – Interview Questions

1. How often do you eat out at restaurants?
2. Why do you choose to eat out at restaurants?
3. How do you decide what to have for dinner and how do you decide whether or not you make the choice to eat out?
 - a. What do you think about when anticipating making dinner for your family? Go through the process that happens in your head.
 - b. What nights of the week do you tend to cook? When you make the decision not to cook, what are the reasons why?
4. What is important to you when you go out to eat at a restaurant?
 - a. How would you compare food that you prepare at home to food you purchase from a food establishment in terms of taste and flavor?
 - b. How would you compare the differences in the amount of food consumed outside the home versus food prepared at home?
5. If you decide not to cook dinner at home, what type of food establishments do you tend to go to?
6. What do you think a healthy meal is?
 - a. How do you view the health of a meal made at home versus a meal purchased outside the home?
7. How would you compare the experience of eating in a restaurant to getting take-out and eating it at home?
8. Give me your own definition of cooking. How does the way you cook everyday fit into that definition?
9. How did you learn how to cook?
10. Do you use recipes?
11. If you were going to list what is most important to you about how and why you make dinner what would that entail?
12. If you were going to list what you enjoy and do not enjoy about making dinner what would that entail?
13. Does what you know about cooking impact the quality of your experience?

14. What other elements of making the meal influence your experience?
 - a. The organization of the kitchen?